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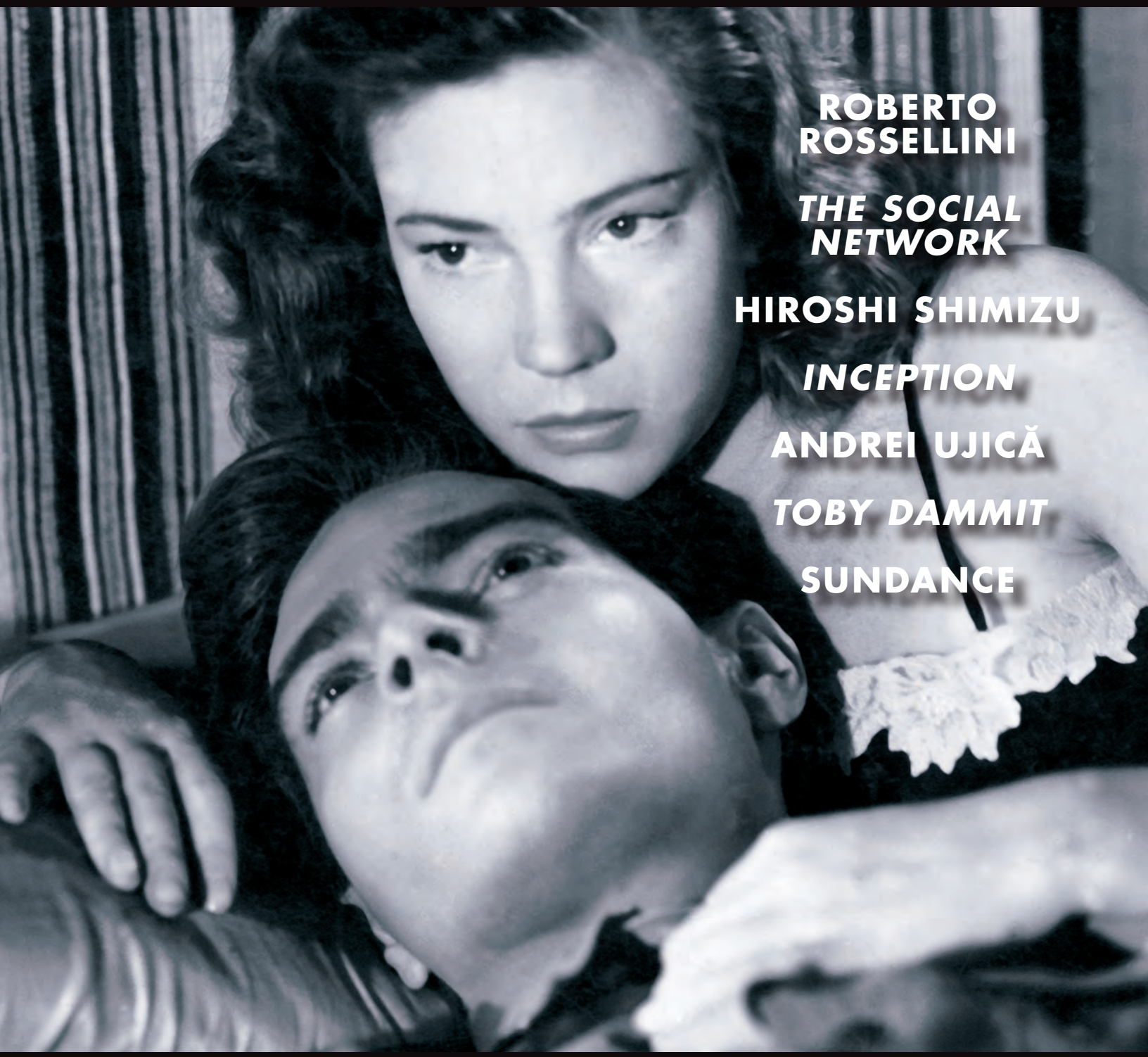

ROBERTO ROSSELLINI

THE SOCIAL NETWORK

HIROSHI SHIMIZU

INCEPTION

ANDREI UJICĂ

TOBY DAMMIT

SUNDANCE

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CONTRIBUTORS

Caetlin Benson-Allott wrote about Kathryn Bigelow in the winter 2010 issue.

Marcia Butzel teaches at Clark University.

Joshua Clover is the author of *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About* (University of California Press).

Ryan Cook is a Ph.D. candidate at Yale University.

Mark Fisher blogs at k-punk.abstractdynamics.org.

David Forgacs is the author of *Rome Open City* (BFI Film Classics, 2000).

Martin Fradley teaches at the University of Manchester.

Ina Rae Hark is Distinguished Professor Emerita, University of South Carolina.

D. A. Miller is the author of *8½* (BFI Film Classics, 2008).

David Nowell-Smith lives in Paris.

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith is a former editor of *Screen*.

Rebecca Prime teaches at Hood College.

B. Ruby Rich teaches at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Paul Julian Smith wrote about *Pan's Labyrinth* in the summer 2007 issue.

David Sterritt is chair of the National Society of Film Critics.

Dan Streible teaches at New York University.

Paul Thomas wrote about *Bright Star* in the spring 2010 issue.

J. M. Tyree lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio.

Andrew Utterson teaches at Canterbury Christ Church University, U.K.

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JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

EDITOR Rob White

CONSULTING EDITOR Ann Martin

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HOMESICKNESS

***Inception* (Christopher Nolan)**
***Another Year* (Mike Leigh)**

"Come back and we'll be young men together again," says Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) to old Saito (Ken Watanabe), who has been trapped in a godforsaken fantasy underworld, at the end of *Inception*. Although Edith Piaf's recording of "Non, je ne regrette rien" is repeatedly heard in Christopher Nolan's thriller—it is the musical warning to the film's psyche saboteurs that they are shortly to be "kicked" from one dream realm to another—the film is full of nostalgia and remorse. Cobb himself is anguished by his role in the death of his shellshocked wife, Mal (Marion Cotillard): "I feel guilt," he confesses, "and no matter what I do, no matter how hopeless I am, no matter how confused, that guilt is always there."

"DAY (FEELS LIKE DIFFERENT TIME)" is a scene heading in the shooting script (Insight Editions, 2010) and a surprising aspect of *Inception* is the moribund onscreen technology. Whereas films like *Iron Man* or Nolan's *The Dark Knight* delight in futuristic gadgetry, *Inception* goes retro. A remark the director makes in an interview published with the script about "the infinite potential of the human mind" touches on the matter: "we talk about this all the time, using the analogy of the computer for the human brain." But then he adds, "I am always interested in things that seem to defy that analogy." Nolan's mildly Luddite remark is consistent with the way *Inception* shuns new media. Cobb and his crew of mind hijackers study their target using paper documents and printed photos; three cellphones and a single lonely laptop disappear almost as soon as they are glimpsed and Cobb calls home on an old-fashioned landline with a cord—even walkie-talkie earpieces have curly wire connections. Ariadne (Ellen Page), the film's novice dream architect, builds physical rather than virtual models of her designs; Cobb's sidekick Arthur (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) unpacks his PASIV machine in a room that must have once been a print shop since it contains a type cabinet and two presses. *Inception* spurns wireless telecoms and digitization as if wiring were the tangible emblem of some deeper compulsive attachment to the past. Just look at the desultory zero-gravity set piece: Arthur bundles his drugged cohorts together with electrical cord, then climbs up a wirelike elevator cable before detonating explosives adorned with bright red fusewire. This spacey action sequence is deficient in excitement but it lays bare the circuitry of the film's techno-reminiscence.

Inception is preoccupied with secret mental spaces that preserve the past. It is revealed that Cobb and his wife got lost in an imaginary no-man's-land while they "were exploring the concept of a dream-within-a-dream" and he surreptitiously brainwashed her in order to return to reality. Her suicide was the unintended consequence of this manipulation and it fills Cobb with a regret so strong it resembles addiction. Narcosis is crucial to the film: as well as being crisscrossed by wires, *Inception* abounds with pharmaceutical infusion lines which enable people to tap into the PASIV—short for Portable Automated Somnacin IntraVenous—Device (helpfully diagrammed in an appendix to the script). Cobb tests a sedative in a Mombasa den for dream junkies and sometimes at night he sets up the PASIV machine in order to relive his marriage to Mal. "You don't understand," he tells Ariadne. "These are moments that I regret. They're memories I have to change." But she objects to this DIY therapy, discerning a more coercive intent: "Do you think that you can just build a prison of memories to lock her in?" It is fair comment. Cobb descends in his stupor to a silo-like memory palace with its own elevator. There he apparently chooses to witness his wife's death over and over in his personal nightmare theater and when he shuts the elevator's metal gate he makes a cage for Mal.

The narrative has a shattered, traumatized quality overall, jumping from one different time to another. (A caption for a script illustration could describe the movie itself: "Utopia in Deterioration.") This elaborate thought-control plot cannot quite keep itself together, replicating the oneiric instability that occurs when someone resists the crew. Cobb explains to Ariadne that if dream infiltration is too blatant, the target mind defends itself with antigen-like "projections," uncannily envisioned in the film as peripheral characters that look to camera while the environment starts to shake: "The more you change things the quicker the projections start to converge on you." If that happens, Arthur adds, the saboteurs can be torn to pieces. Near the beginning of *Inception* such an incident occurs in a city dreamed by the billionaire industrialist Saito that could be Tunis or Cairo. The outraged

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Regression, resistance, constraint

First five: *Inception*. © 2010 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc./Legendary Pictures. DVD: Warner Home Video.
Bottom right: *Happy-Go-Lucky*. © 2007 Untitled '06 Distribution Limited, Channel 4 Television Corporation and UK Film Council. DVD: Momentum Pictures (U.K.).

projections are rioters and with their convergence a spectacle of collective rebellion momentarily disrupts this mournful blockbuster.

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The most ostentatious camera movement in Mike Leigh's excellent new film, *Another Year*, is a pan along one wall of Battersea Power Station that discovers Tom (Jim Broadbent) at work as an engineer. The shot's expansiveness is paradoxical because the building's trademark chimneys are never shown and furthermore Tom's attention is fixed on clay samples being extracted from the ground. This double lack of interest in surroundings is characteristic of the director's work in the last twenty years. The tendency is especially pronounced in the brilliant *Topsy-Turvy*, whose only exterior is a dank alleyway. In other films, Leigh mostly stays within a tight perimeter—a home, the roads outside, perhaps a small garden. If characters go shopping or they meet for a drink, there is almost never an establishing shot of a wider urban setting. This myopic style is evident even in *Naked*, despite the fact that its malevolent protagonist prowls the capital's streets. The sense of enclosure or incarceration is so pervasive that the opening sequence of *Happy-Go-Lucky* is very disorienting: we actually get a little tour of landmark London as Poppy (Sally Hawkins) cycles from the city center to Blackfriars Bridge, St Paul's Cathedral visible in the distance. But even here the vista is curtailed; as she jauntily pedals, Poppy is squashed by the narrowing box in which the titles designer has placed her.

This visual constriction must have something to do with the disappearance of political commitment from Leigh's films. In an unusually protracted outdoor scene in 1988's *High Hopes*, Cyril (Philip Davis) and Shirley (Ruth Sheen) visit Marx's grave in Highgate. Cyril intently ponders the monument's radical inscription—"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point however is to change it"—and he grows dejected: "The thing is, change what? It's a different world now, innit? By the year 2000 there'll be thirty-six TV stations twenty-four hours a day telling you what to think. It's pissing in the wind, innit?" After this, only the displaced traces of politics remain, as inconsequential as the Che Guevera print visible on a bedroom wall in *Another Year*. "I suppose on a clear day you can see the

Mary, Tom and Gerri

Another Year. Photos: Simon Mein. © Thin Man Films Ltd. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics.

class struggle from here," jokes Hannah (Catrin Cartlidge) in *Career Girls* as she looks out of the Thames-side window of a yuppie apartment. Nicola (Jane Horrocks) in *Life Is Sweet* wears a "BOLLOCKS TO THE POLL TAX" T-shirt, but the sentiment does not appear to run very deep because her mother comments, "you should be joining one of those socialist wotsit groups or the nuclear disarmament whatever, but you don't." Like so many other Leigh characters, Nicola is self-destructive and inert, prone to bingeing uncontrollably on junk food. Only Vera (Imelda Staunton) in *Vera Drake* really breaks with the norms of apathy or obsessiveness. Asked by the police why she offered young women illegal abortions she replies with anomalous conviction: "they need help." Yet *Vera Drake* is set in 1950 and in this respect does not contradict the notion that politics in Leigh's films had an expiry date sometime around 1988.

Imelda Staunton returns for a grim cameo in *Another Year* as a depressed woman who visits therapist Gerri (Ruth Sheen again), Tom's wife. Asked by Gerri what single thing would improve her life, she answers, "A different life." (Gerri's response has a sour undertone of accusation: "A different life. Change is frightening, isn't it?") Staunton's character leads a miserable parade. Tom's brother is stupefied and his nephew seethes with unexplained grievances. Two friends, Mary (Lesley Manville) and Ken (Peter Wight), are drunks. Each of them in turn loses control after dinner with the couple. The scenes mirror one other: both characters, for example, discuss their lack of holiday plans (Mary is likably jovial, Ken maudlin). Leigh treats the pairing with a disconcerting dramatic irony: the characters receive unequal treatment. It is true that Ken is a lifelong friend while Mary, a secretary at the clinic where Gerri works, is a more casual acquaintance, but the difference does not fully account for an inconsistency in Gerri's conduct. Speaking under the influence, Mary rues a failed relationship: "I blame my big heart," she says and receives a cold reply from Gerri: "Well, we all have to make choices, don't we?" But later Gerri discusses Ken with Mary, observing: "He's got a good heart. Life's not always kind, is it?" Choice, it seems, does not have quite the same part to play in his case.

"We created, built a world for ourselves," Cobb recalls, referring to the years he and Mal spent in their dream-within-a-dream, and the same can be said of Gerri and Tom. Nothing is allowed to destabilize their inane chatter, family rituals, and reproachful hospitality (the churlish nephew, who may see the couple more clearly than others do, refuses to accept booze provided by them). After Mary makes a fool of herself with a bout of jealousy, she is banished. Gerri and Tom discuss the episode in bed. "Very sad," he says, not sad at all. "Really upsetting," she agrees, showing no sign of being upset. He continues, "Yeah, are you surprised?" She responds, "Course I am; no I'm not actually"—and with that the whole business becomes an opportunity for self-congratulation, reinforcing the couple's insular domain which not only keeps the outside world at bay but also is far less welcoming, and more punishing, than it pretends to be.

Another Year ends with an extraordinary and desolate shot. Mary, hungover and abject, has been allowed to cross the domestic threshold once more and she joins the couple, their son, and his girlfriend for a meal. While Gerri and Tom rehearse for what might be the thousandth time a story from the early days of their marriage, the camera slowly moves toward Mary until she is confined alone in the frame. The shot holds on her daunted expression and then all sound fades away, an extreme acoustic version of Leigh's cramped framings. The world around Mary has been cut off and replaced with a prison house of silence.

Rob White

THE LOOKING CLASS

***Black Swan* (Darren Aronofsky)**
***Country Strong* (Shana Feste)**

Doubling is a paradigmatic trope in cinema, at every stratum from the technical doubling of apparatus and human perception, to the doubling of the worlds that exist on each side of the screen. It is ever with us. Nonetheless the class of 2010–11 is taken with a doubling delirium. This includes the least likely doubling in film history. Here is a plot: a man has been driven mad by guilt for his role in his wife's death, and has retreated into a dream world. To draw him forth from this, he is launched into a *different* dream world of action and adventure, with a puzzle to solve. But we are given to understand, according to a more or less explicit set of intimations, that he is in fact working on his own mental problems in the hopes that he can heal himself, accept his wife's death, and return to reality.

This is a particularly baroque invention; what are the odds that Hollywood would make this movie twice? Much less make it twice in one year . . . with the same actor playing the leads? And it is not just Leonardo DiCaprio's peculiarly apt mug, cynical attention masking a bloated and childlike core, which visually joins these improbably doubled narratives. *Shutter Island* and *Inception* share further, unlikely formulations—not the least of which is the visual invention of the stark, crumbling cliffs that isolate the broken Leonardo's land of the lost from the world of the living. Such doublings between films that are themselves about doubling sets up a turbulent recursion of a different order than Hollywood's unremarkable habit of repeating successful formulae; the audience bedazzlement that each movie hopes to solicit (*is this really happening?*) lodges far more intensely in the relation between the two films.

In train of this uncanny doubling, there has been a spate of both inter- and intrafilmic examples. *Black Swan* pursues it with Darren Aronosky's usual rage for excess: *everything* is doubled and doubled again. Myriad mirror shots underscore the overkill, with the object eventually serving as deadly weapon: the lead character in fact dies of a mirror shot.

Black Swan is a backstage drama: this is the first, generic doubling. *Swan Lake*, staged in the movie, is itself a doubling story of Odette and Odile, white and black swan princesses.

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Repetition compulsion
First and third: *Shutter Island*. © 2009 Paramount Pictures Corporation. DVD: Paramount Home Entertainment. Second and fourth: *Inception*. © 2010 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc./Legendary Pictures. DVD: Warner Home Video.

They are traditionally danced by a single ballerina, who must double herself. The ballerina here is Nina (Natalie Portman), who replaces an older and faded star, Beth (Winona Ryder), both as the company's lead and possible consort of the artistic director. Nina is also doubled by her mother, an unhinged former dancer played by Barbara Hershey, with whom she shares a claustrophobic New York apartment. But Nina is further doubled by Lily (note how each name is itself a doubling, just as the names double each other), played by Mila Kunis, a new member of the company who swiftly becomes her alternate. Arrived from San Francisco (setting up a bonus doubling game about coastal cultures), Lily has the sensual élan that Nina lacks and the Odile character requires, and so threatens to replace her in the already doubled role.

Or does she? We aren't given to know, as Nina is driven mad by the situation, or driven mad again—a previous breakdown is alluded to. It remains uncertain how much of the narrative is delusion. You could say she is maddened by excessive doubling, though you could say the same about the director; the film's sense of overstuffed surfeit arises as much from his doubling-hysteria as hers. At least the film knows that excess doubling is precisely the problem: the mother, like so many screen maniacs before her, keeps a shrine of the same portrait in near-endless repetition, with only minor variation. In this case it's a self-portrait. It is an under-remarked matter that this has become a kind of unquestioned folk belief, at least in the movies: the sign of madness is having too many copies of the same image.

Hence Nina's madness. All the doubling swirls miasmatically around her: Odette/Odile, her and her mother, her and Beth, her and Lily. Both those latter pairs are distorted versions of what should properly be named the "*All About Eve* doubling," wherein a younger, more vital female performer threatens to take over the role and the life of the older and more fragile one. As an aside, the revelation of this device is the retroactive recognition not that Aronofsky's film is actually a melodrama along the lines of *All About Eve* (or *Stella Dallas* or *Sunset Blvd.*), but rather that those were body-horror movies like *Black Swan*. The real of body horror is aging itself, decay, redundancy, replacement. That women, within the diegesis of each of these films, are not just the victims but the agents of this terror, is an exact measure of Hollywood's gender trouble.

One would suspect that *Country Strong*, a gently appealing genre flick, is distant from the Grand Guignol of *Black Swan*. But it has its own doubling urge, albeit more schematic.

It offers four main characters, representing the four quadrants of Hollywood's stunted demographic model: older female, younger female, younger male, older male. The first three are country singers; the only character who isn't is *played* by an actual country singer, just to keep the doubling channels open. That's Tim McGraw, in the role of James, husband–manager to a country superstar, Kelly Canter (Gwyneth Paltrow, an older woman at thirty-eight). McGraw is doubled by Beau (Garrett Hedlund), a true soul who is nonetheless (unlike James, which is to say, in his place) sleeping with Kelly. But Beau is doubled as well by the young female siren Chiles Stanton, also a rising talent: they both open for Kelly. Chiles is ascending swiftly on beauty-pageant looks and doey naiveté—thus she is in turn also the older star's *All About Eve* double, and begins to receive the acclaim and hit songs once due Kelly. She is played by Leighton Meester, shortly appearing in *The Roommate*, a dorm-room remake of doubling'n'dementia classic, *Single White Female*. It's enough to make your head spin.

Swan . . .
Black Swan. Photo: Niko Tavernise/Fox Searchlight Pictures.

But it doesn't, which is a token of the film's surefootedness, its easygoing locomotion—formally cognate to the Grand Ol' Opry pop it proffers, and affectively distant from *Black Swan*'s propulsive panic. And yet, finally, they are the same movie, and not just because they are backstage dramas: Kelly, coming away from a mental breakdown and in danger of relapse, pushed by a younger and sexier replacement, cripplingly unable to confront the stage performance that every-

. . . song

Country Strong. Photo: Screen Gems/Sony Pictures Releasing.

body desperately needs from her (most of all herself), is nonetheless compelled to give it a go. She botches a couple of preparatory attempts, acts self-destructively, gets high, fools around, misses a rehearsal gig, visits a hospital, freaks out about her competition. All of which happens in *Black Swan*, as does the remainder: she eventually takes the stage on the big night, gives a bravura, transformative show including magical costume changes, the crowd goes wild, she kills herself, *exeunt omnes*. Along the way, as if for emphasis, there are doubled sequences of Kelly breaking down: her country-strong mascara so smeared around her eyes it can't help but resemble the already iconic black-swanface of Nina's maquillage. It's the Grand Guignol Opry, and Kelly is Country Swan.

The significance of this current wave of doubling delirium remains an open question. A Marxian approach might pursue anxieties around reproduction without real increase. Not as an abstract matter of the postmodern proliferation of empty signs, but as a concrete problem of the economy and its failed profitability, its panicked and fruitless churn of more or less identical commodities, its ceaseless remaking and remodeling of itself without getting anywhere.

But a more immediate curiosity presents itself. What does it mean for Fox Searchlight (*Black Swan*) and Screen Gems (*Country Strong*) to make the same movie at the same time, with about the same budget? Something is particularly suggestive about the pairing: the distinction, such as it is, isn't exactly one of genre, much less of the genders and ages to which they are pitched. The only real distance between *Black Swan* and *Country Strong* is evidently one of social class. The narratives confront each other in the mirror, but it is ballet looking at country music, the heartland peering at Europeanized coastal elites. Naturally one appears as pseudo-art cinema, one as genre fare.

In many ways these are false identifications. Country music sells largely to the suburban middle class; ballet is scarcely limited to neurasthenic cosmopolitans. But they are identifications nonetheless; nobody doesn't know the cultural distinctions implied by the pairing, the figuration of the bourgeois and proletarian. It is this thought, this difference, that Hollywood is thinking, and trying to arbitrage. And yet at the same time, the movies insist that the narratives—the fates—of the two classes are doubles for each other, in the end. That surely is the greatest delusion of them all.

JOSHUA CLOVER is a 2010–11 Fellow at the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University.

10 O'CLOCK STAYING POWER

***The Good Wife* (CBS)**
***Modern Family* (ABC)**

Recently returned to New York, I find myself in a sublet without a television set. Like so many who, in these straitened times, have cut the cable, I turn to the Internet. What could be more convenient than www.hulu.com, the website that hosts the mainstream TV shows that dominate, still, the national media? There's little drama on hulu from even basic cable (only sneak peeks of AMC's breakout zombie show, *The Walking Dead*). But the easily searchable site gives the complete latest episodes of most network series. If, according to the *Economist* (May 1–7, 2010), television is the "great survivor" of old media, exploiting the Internet to reconfirm its continuing dominance, then network TV, long written off in a multichannel environment of supposedly fragmented audiences, is the greatest survivor of all. And two shows in particular, whose second seasons both ran this fall, have savvily combined the critical acclaim of Emmys with the commercial clout of high ratings by reinventing threatened genres: the legal procedural and the family sitcom. Coincidentally, perhaps, both have done so by hybridizing with other formats (serialized fiction and documentary, respectively); and both incorporate new technologies into their fictional worlds. These programs thus offer a glimpse of a kind of quality television (smartly written, expertly played, and crisply produced) that is nonetheless unlikely to break into the canon of self-consciously great TV fiction (*The Wire*, *Mad Men*) now constructed by those cinephiles who have dipped a toe into the electronic medium.

The first program is CBS's *The Good Wife*. And it was star Julianna (*ER*) Margulies who, on accepting her Golden Globe, pointedly thanked her network for its continuing commitment to "10 o'clock drama," so much more expensive to produce than its talk and reality rivals. She has also praised TV as a women's medium. And the striking point of the series' premise (Margulies plays steely Alicia, the publicly loyal spouse of an erring politician, accused of sex with prostitutes) is that it plays out strictly from the female point of view, a virtue for which its married couple of creators, Michelle and Robert King, take the credit. To the casual viewer *The Good Wife* might seem unremarkable, in spite of its unusually glossy mise-en-scène (producers Tony and Ridley Scott are clearly hands-on here). And the fact that Alicia returns to work as a lawyer during her husband's travails enables a "case-of-the-week" procedural plot strand which seems at first all too familiar.

Rapidly ripped from the headlines (one episode barely fictionalized a masseuse scandal that ensnared squeaky-clean Al Gore just weeks before), these legal cases are however merely window dressing for the show's true political and personal concerns, newly complex in a digital world. Thus the second season saw the spotlight move to Alan Cumming, playing against type as Eli Gould, a ruthless campaign manager widely held to be based on President Obama's former Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel (the show is set in Chicago, although shot in New York). One typically complex riff has Eli sponsor a viral video ridiculing a rival for her expensive breast implants, only to deflect blame onto a third candidate when the victim reveals that the reason for her cosmetic surgery was a double mastectomy. Later, seizing on a recent Taiwanese trend, political teams use crude web animation to dramatize their opponents' juicy scandals. In another episode an accused teen star (played by real-life tween idol Miranda Cosgrove) is sent down for tweeting at her own trial. CBS posted those same (fictional) tweets online.

It's through technology once more that the personal plotlines, deeply moving in Margulies' controlled performance (her face resembles nothing more than a Kabuki mask), are slowly rolled out. In the second season, with her husband (Chris Noth) now released from prison, attention shifts to her college sweetheart and current boss Will (Josh Charles). In the first season cliffhanger, Eli had deleted from Alicia's phone the voicemail in which Will declared his love to her. Much later she will accidentally learn of Will's love for her while listening to the wiretaps of yet another corrupt Chicago politico. These expertly parsed deep-level plotlines for the main characters are combined with strong and complex roles for the best ensemble cast on television. One of the the most dramatic moments of the season was when sexy-booted lesbian investigator Kalinda (*Bend It like Beckham*'s Archie Panjabi) methodically smashes the windows of a rival's SUV in a deserted parking lot. In *The Good Wife* politics is as merciless (and as mysterious) as Kalinda. Will says that in Chicago you need your friends just three times: at your wed-

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Quality television

Left: *The Good Wife*. Photo: David M. Russell/CBS. © 2010 CBS. Right: *Modern Family*. © 2010 American Broadcasting Companies Inc./Peter "Stone" Hopper.

ding, your wake, and your first indictment. And the family is fractured too. Alicia's two teenage children don't just follow their father's fortunes on the Internet, they actively intervene in it (they are the source of those Taiwanese-style animations). But they are victims too. Alicia's daughter is caught on tape excusing her dad with the unfortunate ready-for-YouTube line: "It was just one hooker."

Similar embarrassments are the stock in trade of the best current sitcom, ABC's aptly named and Peabody-winning *Modern Family*. If *The Good Wife* hybridizes procedural series and serial drama, *Modern Family*, with its little-known cast, puts a new spin on the pseudo-documentary sitcom: a single camera, no laughter track or studio audience, and a minimal framing conceit of character interviews to an unseen film crew. And where once comedies stuck to a single sofa, now this show swiftly crosscuts between three dysfunctional households in southern California. As the architecture critic Alexandra Lange wrote in *The New York Times*, each home is deftly differentiated through its decorating style. Thus middle-aged parents Phil and Claire favor Pottery Barn chic, traditional suburban fare; the older Jay (Claire's father), in a second marriage to fiery Colombian Gloria, prefers steely masculinity, all glass and leather; and gay parents Cameron and Mitchell (Claire's brother) opt for neo-modern upscale décor, except, of course, for the mural based on the Sistine Chapel with which they decorate the bedroom of their adored baby Lily.

Creators Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd ensure that the writing team keeps the gags coming. Gloria offers a steady stream of malapropisms (to a feuding father and son: "Is so quiet in here. Like Christian Silence Reading Room"); and voices sound South American common sense (to a husband with a heart attack: "In Colombia we couldn't go run to the hospital for every little sniffle or dislocated shoulder"). And the show surreptitiously educates U.S. audiences in such customs as the Latino version of April Fools ("¡Inocente!"). Likewise, casually introducing the family demographic to sights still little seen in primetime, the second episode of this second season saw the gay couple kiss. After ostentatiously avoiding public displays of affection through an entire episode, they sneakily share a quick but affectionate peck in the background to the final scene.

As in *The Good Wife*, *Modern Family*'s characters continue to confound. When skinny uptight Mitchell uncharacteristically takes part in a well-rehearsed flash mob in a shopping mall, chubby theatrical Cam is not as pleased as might have been expected: "You cheated on me . . . with choreography." Further embarrassment comes from that sitcom staple, the mother-in-law's visit, here given a special spin. Cam's mother is inappropriately physical with her son's boyfriend, leading Cam to ask his lover: "Show me on Lily's doll where my mother touched you." But beyond edgy comedy, *Modern Family* also trades in pathos, especially where the straight Anglo household is concerned. Phil attempts with humiliating incompetence to keep up with his kids' lingo and ubiquitous technology (a break from the family's constant cell phone, BlackBerry, and computer use predictably leads to disaster). As a realtor shaken by the housing crash and a husband literally outrun by his wife (they compete at jogging), Phil is as much a failure as a father as the disgraced politician of *The Good Wife*. However, if the characters (antiheroes for the recession) fail, their shows succeed. And both programs don't just reveal the resilience of network television as a medium, which now rivals cable for formal innovation. They also confirm the uncanny persistence of the family, however fractured, and of the family audience, however fragmented.

PAUL JULIAN SMITH is Distinguished Professor in the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures Program at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

TOBY DAMMIT

I

I first wished for a DVD of Fellini's *Toby Dammit* in 1969, when I saw the film on its U.S. theatrical release and DVDs existed only as impracticable dreams. I wanted to detach the film from *Spirits of the Dead*, an anthology of European Poe adaptations where just to reach this version of "Never Bet the Devil Your Head" you had to trudge through the dreary wastes of Roger Vadim's *Metzergenstein* and Louis Malle's *William Wilson*. And then—more important—I wanted to watch the film over again, and in slow motion, and with the projection stopped at certain images and the reel rewound to particular scenes. For *Dammit* was a fugitive film: instead of unfolding before my eyes in the usual manner it seemed to be withdrawing—fleeing—racing from my vision. The images amazed me, but with the quick cuts, the careening pans, the ceaseless movement in the frame as well as by the camera, I got a distinct view of almost none. Now an excellent Arrow Blu-ray lets me correct for the film's infernal velocity, and I may scrutinize its images to my heart's old desire. Yet (no fault of Arrow's) the high definition proves not high enough; my made-in-house stills are all spoiled by some little blur or murky patch impossible to resolve. I must face the fact anew: *Dammit* is a film whose images, even with DVD technology, resist arrest. And for a second time I am driven to wonder why Fellini should have elaborated so extravagant a vision only to make it hard to see. What, after all, is his rush?

II

A quick first answer:

Toby Dammit, the eponymous actor who once performed Shakespeare but now only performs the bad-boy behaviors of an addict and boozer, has come to Rome to star in "the first Catholic Western," a parable of the Savior's return to earth as a lonesome cowboy. No wonder Toby has demanded a Ferrari for his participation! The already overblown conceit, described at length by the production associates as they drive him from the airport, will suck up the genre's other prerequisites too: "Our two outlaws represent irresponsibility and anarchy; the busty girl is the illusory escape into the irrational, the prairie is the region beyond history; and the buffalo are the means of subsistence for which man must struggle." To convey this relentless allegory (from which even the buffalo are forbidden to roam), the film will make use of images "eloquent in their poverty . . . a cross between Dreyer and Pasolini with a touch a John Ford." Poverty and eloquence are two sides of the same coin: by dint of their spareness, the images will have the enunciative clarity of pure signs. And as the reference to Dreyer and company implies, their march across the screen will be nothing if not measured.

While Toby is being told all this, the camera, aligned with his point of view, looks out the car window at the passing scene. In a few crowded seconds, the following images proceed and vanish before our eyes: a van with slabs of slaughtered beef inside; a lighting store full of illuminated fixtures; some construction work along the road; a fashion shoot; a religious procession; some Beatle lookalikes—to go no further. The dissonance between the film being described, with its minimalist images perfectly obedient to their function as signs, and the film we are seeing, with the opacity and clutter of *its* images overwhelming any possible semiotic obligation, could not be more striking. Against a film designed for exhaustive explanation, Fellini mounts the resistance of a visual practice that can only be encountered on the run. The breakneck pace forestalls interpretation by frustrating vision itself.

III

Dammit's commitment to speed follows from the swift dialectical vicissitudes of Fellini's style in the 1960s. In *8½* (1963), Fellini gave us a director hero who had "nothing to say," but wanted "to say it anyway." The film dramatized a shift from the art cinema's ethos of intellectual statements—the Something to Say—to the visual autism of a socially irrelevant, but all the more bedazzling style—the Something to See. But even as Fellini was filming *8½*, the visuals of *La dolce vita* (1960) went Hollywood in Vincente Minnelli's *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962), where the Via Veneto and the Excelsior already looked as clichéd as the Bois de Boulogne and Maxim's in the fin-de-siècle Paris of *Gigi* (1958). And after *8½*, the process of commodification only accelerated. Reduced to a name ("the Felliniesque") and a set of typical attributes (grotesque, dreamlike, virtuosic), the Something to See became little more than a way for spectators not to see it.

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Under such conditions, Fellini's stylistic practice seemed condemned to either of two fates. One—represented by *Juliet of the Spirits* (1964), the film after 8½—was a mannerism content to reproduce the commodified Felliniesque in Fellini's own name. And the other—represented by "Il viaggio di G. Mastorna," the project after *Juliet*—was a failure to produce anything at all. What the fictional director did in 8½, the real one did to "Mastorna": with sets built, parts cast, and a crew assembled, Fellini abandoned the film. On the originality of 8½, he had found it impossible to build anything original.

Caught between reproduction and no production, Fellini appears to have thought of *Dammit*, his first project after "Mastorna," as an *exercise de style* that would mirror back to him his unmanageable quandary. In it, he says, "I tried to mock myself—destroy myself—exacerbate 'Fellini style' to the point of parody and no return." *Dammit* would end repetition by repeating Fellini hallmarks ad nauseam. And since parody works best by abridgment—by leaving out the tissue connecting the tics—the form of this violent reprise would be a digest in overdrive.

The first three of *Dammit*'s four episodes reiterate—in perfect order, but *exacerbatively*—the well-known Silvia sequences from *La dolce vita*: her airport arrival and ride into Rome; her interview with the press; her appearance at a nightclub. Everything now has been cheerlessly routinized. On *his* arrival at Fiumicino, Toby descends no plane ladder, nor does a cavalcade of convertibles escort him into town; he is confined to interiors, behind glass. The interview, once live in a hotel room, occurs in a TV studio with the canned questions matched to canned applause by experts in white coats; and Toby's hostility to his interviewers, themselves antagonistic, replaces Silvia's happy flirtation with a titillated media. The nightclub, with a slight theme change from Baths of Caracalla to Hadrian's Villa, has become the venue for a thoroughly scripted awards ceremony—the Italian Oscars—abounding in phonies who are far beyond the reach of that ecstasy which once impelled all present to join in Silvia's primal dance. The "dolce vita" has surrendered its intoxicating sweetness to an irony as bitter as the whisky Toby half drinks, and half spits up, to go on living it.

As *Dammit*'s content repeats *La dolce vita*, its style is rehearsing the tricks and devices of 8½, to whose virtuosity it adds a kind of coda. But in *Dammit* the virtuosity is squared, its execution quickened so as to outpace the speed of the cooptive culture in which it must move. For example, those disorienting pans that introduce us to the denizens of the airport lounge take the technique of 8½'s spa sequence to a new level of *confusione*. This is not just owing to the pinwheeling miscellany of religions, ethnicities, and outfits. Unlike at the spa, it is no longer clear even what people are doing here. Though we might commonsensically suppose they are arriving or departing, the visual plan suggests they inhabit a more enigmatic condition in which no one is going anywhere. Sometimes, huddled in heaps, they seem simply abandoned; at other times, in urgent prayer, they appear to have taken refuge from the mysterious disaster (a storm? a war?) that the orange light suffusing the corridor, the strange wind rushing through it, and the brutal-looking mercenaries policing it all combine to connote. And though they're most often in motion, it is only to and fro, retracing their steps or even walking backward. The speeded-up montage, as if similarly trying to avoid such a deadlock, only insinuates into the movement of images the same unbearable stasis.

IV

The royal road for tracking this creeping stagnation is to follow the mutation suffered here by the Fellini object par excellence: the face. However eccentric, extravagant, or ruthlessly caricatured the face in Fellini had been before *Dammit*, it always stood in a classically expressive relation to character: its features amounted to so many traits of the person wearing it. In *La dolce vita* and 8½, there were two kinds of faces: the generalized good looks reserved for the protagonist (Mastroianni), and the vividly exaggerated faces worn by the minor characters (everyone else). Both kinds were revealing. If the protagonist's face looked vague in its very beauty, that was because he was a "beautiful soul," detached from the determinations of a world that he preferred to sample (like Marcello) or soar over (like Guido). By contrast, the vivid "Fellini faces" went to show that the other characters *had* characters, at once richly specified and cruelly limited.

But look at the first face we see when Toby lands at the airport. It is the female face that appears as an image on a ceiling monitor. Its outsized, overcomposed features communicate nothing but the affable vacancy required to announce departing flights. The 1960s "flip," a barely softened helmet, echoes the bulbous shape of the head like a second skull. Along with the high Peter Pan collar, the tight round framings of both the image and monitor detach the head from the rest of the body. We notice, too, that these framings do not quite coincide. As if projected onto the screen rather than emanating from behind it, the image never stays put within the monitor, and (like the head on certain dolls) appears to bobble. Reduced to icon, function, "look," this face is anything but a window on the person, let alone the soul. And what seems most to disable its transparency is that the face is overwhelmed by the head.

FELLINI'S FACEHEADS

Toby Dammit. © Les Films Marceau Paris—P.E.A. Rome. DVD: Arrow Films (U.K.).

In this way, the announcer announces the metamorphosis of the old Fellini face into what I will call the Facehead. Again and again, with inexhaustible invention, *Dammit* makes us witness the spectacle of the face—traditional sign of a person—being transformed into a head that seems only a thing. Instead of an old-fashioned expression, these Faceheads seem to be wearing masks that have nothing to disguise. The only mobile features among them belong to a TV interviewer doing facial exercises before her show and a performer whose rubberface is part of a novelty act. Some Faceheads wear actual masks, cardboard cutouts that render them two-dimensional in the strictest sense. Atop the Facehead, hair is lacquered like a shell or frizzy like a wig, inviting us antithetically to imagine what on many male examples has become all too salient: the bald or thinning pate, where balding is to be understood as marking the further advance of cranium over visage. And below, the neck has been lost to view through late-60s accessories (chokers, mufflers, Mao collars, fur pieces), oversized masks, or Fellini's literally cutthroat close-ups. Thus detached and unbelonging, seeming to float and turn in a void, the Faceheads offer so many iterations of the decapitation that will finally take narrative form in Toby's fatal accident.

Are the Faceheads human? Alive? At times, they are attached to so many prostheses (headphones, antennas, mikes, even heavy-framed or dark glasses) that they more closely resemble insects, aliens, or robots. And when the thick makeup does not make them look dead, the masks—like the Invisible Man's bandages—turn them into implicitly hideous survivors of perhaps the same unnamed catastrophe intimated at the airport. More object than subject, the Facehead finds its most evolved state in those wholly insentient globular lamps and monitors that decorate *Dammit*'s world. The skull no longer lies discreetly "beneath" the skin; it has become the undisguised module for everyone's design for living.

Even Toby's own good looks—inherited from earlier Fellini protagonists—are spoiled by a truant eyebrow shooting up the forehead, as though he might just become a werewolf, a suggestion reinforced by his sudden howling in the car near the end. But he is more visibly in danger of becoming a Facehead like the others. His waxen, humid complexion already looks embalmed and becomes even more ghastly under the paparazzi's blanching flashes. Nonetheless, if his expression is sometimes artificially withdrawn or theatrically exaggerated, it still manages to convey a genuine struggle against the transformation that has claimed the others, including the usual female salvation figure who, though she never actually saves the protagonist, has always before (like Paola in *La dolce vita* or the water bearer in 8½) radiated undeniable vitality.

Yet what point can Toby's struggle have? What authentic state would he be retaining or returning to? For the old expressivity now poses a problem, too. Toby's only emotion, after all, is disgust. He looks nauseous; and when he sticks his tongue out at people, it's both a reflex—they make him gag—and the expression of a project—to vomit right in their face (which is also ours) everything he's ingested from their noxious world. His quest would be not to recover full expressivity, but to enact a self-impoverishment that emptied him of everything *including* character-building disgust. It is essential to this ambition that, uniquely in the film, Toby has a personal demon: in the form of a sly little girl—a prenubile vamp very different from *La dolce vita*'s "Umbrian angel"—this devil keeps tempting him to play with her ball. Toby's wild drive in the Ferrari will involve making a pact with her as the only proof of his having a soul at all. And though, inevitably, he must lose his soul, he gets to lose his head too.

V

In their satire of a late, "decadent" phase of cultural production, the first three episodes of *Dammit* make some claim to redemptive social value. Their rapidity in outracing a speed culture would be an attempt to get a critical distance *on* their subject matter as well as *from* it. But how secure, how stable could this distance be? Fellini's delirious tempo makes too good a fit with life in the fast lane; and the glibness of three cloned starlets making the identical thank-you speech is not so different from the facility of the perfectly matched jump cuts that bring them before us. Like Toby, Fellini is constantly signaling his own revulsion at what must be, sooner or later, his style's complicity with its revolting content. Recall the fashion shoot alongside the road construction: the auteurist brand ripped off to sell product. What can Fellini add, the first three episodes all seem to ask, to a world already nauseatingly replete with Felliniesque touches?

But the final sequence—Toby's reckless drive—puts all this in the shade. In a frenzy of acceleration, it takes the film's speed to the limit, surpassing anything yet seen in Fellini's *oeuvre*. This is the speed of nightmares, drugs, and car accidents spun into one. And Fellini seems to be looking not just for a faster form of virtuosity, but also for a purer one, one whose supreme velocity would transport the film from its sickening worldly content to nothing but motion, light, darkness: sheer cinema. Tellingly, the distinctive pans employed earlier for the passing parade of Faceheads are now used to

DEATH DRIVE

Toby Dammit. © Les Films Marceau Paris—P.E.A. Rome. DVD: Arrow Films (U.K.).

negotiate depopulated corners when Toby makes a turn. And when the Ferrari is speeding ahead, Fellini gives us images of the road unfolding like a ribbon, so as to remind us that, like the car, the film is ripping up a strip. In the Ferrari's velocity, Fellini's virtuosity has found a new vehicle.

"Death to the Faceheads!" might be the drive's motto. They are sparsely visible here and only in their most drastically devitalized forms: as posters, mannequins, cutouts. The posters all depict heads being destroyed or effaced: one is coming open, another is all silhouette and a third has the lower half of its face missing under a mask. As for the mannequins, bizarre chef/waiter figures placed outside restaurants not even open for business, Toby smiles contemptuously at one, deliberately runs down another.

I misremembered Toby's joyride cum deathtrip as a single sustained race to decapitation; in fact, it repeatedly loses momentum and starts over. Toby winds up off the main road in a maze of little streets where he must stop, leave the car, ask for directions; and even back on the highway, he smashes through a roadblock, again halts and resumes. All these frustrations come literally to a head when he reaches a collapsed bridge. There, on the other side, stands the diabolical vampette who beckons him to come play and thus inspires his fateful wish: to drive the Ferrari fast enough to leap the gap between road and bridge.

By now we understand that far more tempting than the devil's putative pederastic charms is the ball she holds. Smooth, without color or particularities, equally removed from the vitality of a person and the living death of a zombie, this ball is the utmost abstraction of the Facehead and—as such—its only possible alternative. When it rolls into the frame next to Toby's severed head, we too are weirdly compelled by the exchange of the Facehead's imitation of life for the sphere's realization of death.

Whether from malice or genuine inspiration, Fellini has lifted Toby's drive from *Two Weeks in Another Town*, but he alters his source almost beyond recognition. Unlike Fellini's Ferrari, Minnelli's Maserati is little more than the conveyance of catharsis: its roar is never permitted to drown out the more important monologue in which the protagonist (another alcoholic actor come to Rome for a film) talks himself free of his obsession with the ex along for the ride. Rather than killed, he gets cured; only his self-destructiveness is laid to rest as he resumes a successful acting career. It is not just that, by contrast, Fellini replaces cure with fatality; his emptied-out style abstracts this fatality from pathos and narrative rationale alike. Toby's is a sheer death drive.

Death, of course, is openly figured in the film's last image. One of Joseph Nathanson's great matte shots, it discloses the broody abyss that the Ferrari has flown over; on one edge lies the highway with its broken dividing line and on the other stands the bridge with its evenly spaced arc lamps. Not just the collapsed part, but every part of this road seems fissured, like the always-already segmented filmstrip that has effectively decapitated Toby by a jump cut between one frame and the next. In the obscene way that the thick reinforcing wires curl out from the break like shreds of torn nerve and sinew, the bridge seems less damaged than mortally injured, a metonym for Toby's headless carcass, which has presumably fallen down its cleft. This is an image of such radical stillness that, if the lighting didn't change from night to day, we could mistake it for a freeze frame. At last the film performs the pause function it has made us wish for and gives us time to look, contemplate, "remember we must die." Before the vision of what it would overrun, it stops dead in its tracks.

Yet *Dammit*'s identification with Toby's death drive binds the film not just to death, but also to the drive—not just to Toby, in other words, but to the Ferrari too. And, however memorable the matte shot, the drive receives an even more stunning figuration. Because of the placement of the decapitating wire over the far side of the bridge, we must assume that the Ferrari has succeeded in jumping the gap. Other circumstantial evidence confirms this. We observe tread marks beneath the wire, and, though a mere falling barrel had made a dreadful racket only moments before, we hear no noise whatsoever, let alone any suggestion of a crash. Having made it across, however, the car seems to vanish. To those curious enough to ask where it has gone, the film supplies a mind-boggling answer. Earlier in the film, if we had eyes to see something besides Faceheads, we might have spotted a car with no driver moving slowly among the other vehicles in traffic. That buried image now comes into its own as the film asks us to imagine, as the very negation of image, a souped-up version of the driverless car liberated from gridlock and belting along an endlessly deviating road, truly death-proof. Unseen and unseeable, this image outraces all attempts to capture it.

D. A. MILLER is John F. Hotchkis Professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author of *8½* (BFI Film Classics, 2008).

DVD DATA *Spirits of the Dead: Histoires Extraordinaires* [*Metzengerstein, William Wilson, Toby Dammit*], Blu-ray. Directors: Roger Vadim, Louis Malle, Federico Fellini. © [1968] Les Films Marceau Paris—P.E.A. Rome. Publisher: Arrow Films (U.K.). £22.99, 1 disc.

RULES OF THE ROAD: THE TRAVELING FILMS OF HIROSHI SHIMIZU

RYAN COOK CONSIDERS THE SUBTLE PLEASURES OF A NEGLECTED JAPANESE AUTEUR

Hiroshi Shimizu (1903–66), who made films for the Shochiku studio, was fond of mountains and even was rumored to have owned one. He frequently journeyed with his cast and crew into the mountains to make films set on high-altitude roads or at spas. While many of these films have been celebrated by critics, in part for their use of location shooting at a time when studio films tended not to stray from the production lot, they have until recently been unavailable on DVD. In 2008 Shochiku revived three of them for a long-overdue Japanese release in a boxed set entitled *Mountain Landscapes*. The set includes *Mr. Thank You* (1936), *Masseurs and a Woman* (1938), and *Ornamental Hairpin* (1941), along with a fourth bonus disc containing the 1933 silent *Japanese Girls at the Harbor*, which is in fact not set in the mountains at all, but at sea level. In 2010 the Criterion Collection published a set containing the same four films, but with a shift in editorial emphasis, from mountains to travel, encapsulated in the title of the U.S. edition, *Travels with Hiroshi Shimizu*. The new title usefully encourages viewers to regard Shimizu with a different optic.

Mountain landscapes and travel are not the same thing. Mountains are big, motionless things that either defy representation by sheer scale, or offer themselves up as flattened, sliced-out symbols (such as the image of Mount Fuji in the Shochiku company logo that precedes *Masseurs and a Woman* and *Ornamental Hairpin*, and which contrasts notably with the natural mountain scenery inhabited by travelers in the films themselves). Furthermore, a landscape implies the sense of a fixed destination, as in the kinds of advertising images that became common in 1930s Japan after the construction of new roads and rail lines led to a major increase in domestic tourism. (A character in *Mr. Thank You* alludes to such campaigns when he quips that questions about the origins of the word "hiking" should be referred to a railroad tourism company.) By contrast, travel involves movement and the intermediate sensations of journeying; the destination, if it is reached, is only a part of the experience. It is on the road, then, that Criterion locates these Shimizu films, and it is only the first advantage of this approach that the otherwise incongruous *Japanese Girls at the Harbor*, a singular specimen of interwar urban modernism, now finds common ground with the rest of the set.

Matsuo Kishi, a film critic and Shimizu enthusiast, was early to applaud the director's "traveling spirit." In a 1941 essay collected in the *Hiroshi Shimizu Film Reader* (*Eiga dokuhon: Shimizu Hiroshi*, Film Art Sha, 2000), he notes that Shimizu tended to plant his camera at the center of the road and shoot straight down the middle. Unlike the perpendicular view from the side which would break the road into segments only as long as the frame of the image (and in doing so measure a lateral progression), Shimizu's camera occupied the same space as the traveler, representing the road as a continuously flowing zone. Shimizu's roads do not have beginning or end points. Though characters come from somewhere and are headed somewhere else (usually Tokyo), the films usually begin and end on the road, and in this sense their movement—both as journeys and as narratives—is not just a matter of purpose or linear progress. Therefore, in spite of the remarkable fact that these films were made on location, they are in a way unlocated. The mountain pass and the roadside inn in Shimizu's films are exteriors in more than one sense—they belong both to the open air and to a space outside the ordinary realities of their characters' lives. In her 2003 University of Chicago dissertation, "Traveling Film History," Sharon Hayashi describes Shimizu's exteriors as spaces beyond society, the nuclear family, and even the nation—where temporary and "artificial communities" of outliers (migrant workers, people with disabilities, women fleeing home, children) take shape. For the duration of a journey, the road becomes a kind of utopia, an asylum separate from the traveler's everyday existence; as a form of escape, this road thus resembles the movies.

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In transit
Mr. Thank You. © 1936 Shochiku Co. Ltd. DVD: Criterion Eclipse.

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Mr. Thank You is an expansion of a three-page story by Yasunari Kawabata (winner of the 1968 Nobel Prize for literature). The film portrays a bus ride from an economically depressed rural area of the Izu Peninsula toward a regional train station along the line to Tokyo, a destination that is itself just another transfer point along a provincial route. From start to finish, the film unfolds almost entirely on the road, inside a vehicle that transports passengers while framing views of passing scenery in its windows. The Shochiku studio van used as the rural car for hire rolls through the landscape as panoramas move and change on all sides, and as its rear-view mirror parcels views within the bus itself. The car is a complex mechanism for framing moving pictures, an on-screen surrogate for Shimizu's cameras. Furthermore, the passengers are seated in rows like an audience and so the bus also resembles a movie theater.

Among the passengers are a daughter on her way to be sold into prostitution in Tokyo; a modern girl adrift on the road after a similar history; and an easily wounded gentleman, evidently going nowhere in particular, who has seen better days. These travelers share the suspended reality of transit while their vehicle winds its way through traffic. "Mr. Thank You" is a nickname for the driver of the bus (played by Ken Uehara) who is celebrated by the locals along his route for never failing to express gratitude to those who make way. As the title implies, courtesy is the film's theme and refrain, and when an ostentatious private car from the city flouts decorum and impatiently overtakes the bus without so much as a nod, engine failure is the karmic consequence. When Mr. Thank You passes, however, Shimizu marks the occasion by using the metacinematic "phantom ride" technique, identifying the film spectator with the observant occupants of the bus. The technique, found in early travel films, consists of a mobile view taken from the front (or back) of a moving vehicle to reproduce what a passenger in a vehicle would see, but framed so as to make the vehicle itself invisible and therefore even give the impression of some supernatural source of propulsion. The detached view that is associated with Mr. Thank You's bus (but which is unframed by his windshield) approaches traffic from behind, but does not push others out of the way. The maneuver of passing is handled by means of a small ellipsis, a dissolve to a frontal view of the obstacle now receding into the distance behind. This phantom view that passes right through people without disturbing them then moves forward on its path as these pedestrians, cinematic

MR. THANK YOU

Mr. Thank You. © 1936 Shochiku Co. Ltd. DVD: Criterion Eclipse.

shadows, are thanked by an offscreen voice: "*arigato*!" In this way, the bus travels as smoothly and surely as the film on which it is recorded.

Masseurs and a Woman (recently remade in Japan with Tsuyoshi Kusanagi from the enduring idol band SMAP in the lead role) is equally "*urusai*," equally fussy and persistent about the etiquette of overtaking. But whereas *Mr. Thank You* envisions a gracious progression in which no one is inconvenienced, traffic in *Masseurs and a Woman* is a competition. The repeated refrain of Toku (Jishin Tokudai), the blind masseur who makes a preoccupation of leaving sighted fellow travelers in his dust, is not "thank you," but "how unfortunate!" He offers this ambiguous apology again and again to people whom he offends along the road. In contrast to *Mr. Thank You*, people in *Masseurs and a Woman* tend to move by foot—as "hikers" in the sophisticated English that marks them as being on holiday from the city—having taken to the road for sport more than for refuge. Since for Toku sport means competition, the courtesy and flowing motion of *Mr. Thank You* are replaced here with challenges and handicaps. The blind masseurs stumble past their perceived adversaries, then take advantage of their professional position to create other obstacles: after a particularly rough massage from Toku, the hikers are laid up at a roadside spa town to convalesce. In turn they torment him as he stumbles blindly around the town plying his trade.

There is also a woman from Tokyo (Mieko Takamine) who, unlike the hikers, arrives by car and seems to be in flight from the metropolis. But she too is pulled into Toku's world of sport when he develops first a fixation with her exotic fragrance and then a suspicion that she is responsible for a series of thefts at the resort. He circulates clumsily from inn to inn pursuing the mystery (followed himself by Shimizu's mobile camera), but the intrigue evaporates as quickly and meaninglessly as it began, like a game played to pass the time during a long journey. ("This is boring," says a young boy staying at the inn who grows impatient with adult distractions from the lack of progress.) When it is time to go, the woman's car transports her away from Toku and the inn, followed part way by Shimizu's camera as it turns out of sight on the path leaving town. Another "phantom ride" echoing *Mr. Thank You* returns the film in conclusion to the equilibrium of the open road.

Masseurs and a Woman, like the other films in the set, suggests travel in another sense: it evokes its own process of transition within film history. Sound cinema came slowly to Japan, in part because of the institution of the *benshi* film narrator. As late as 1938, when *Masseurs and a Woman* was made, nearly a third of Japanese productions were still silent films, and *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* demonstrates that Shimizu himself had been at home in the silent-film idiom only a few years earlier. *Mr. Thank You* directly refers to the transitional state of Japanese cinema through a bit of dialogue: from the perspective of provincial travelers, Tokyo is home to both "Taki, a woman who talks like a man," and to the "talkies, in which men talk like women" (a joke omitted by the English subtitles in this edition). This is a reference to the actress Takiko Mizunoe, known affectionately as Taki, who in the 1930s became famous for playing men's roles in the Shochiku Kagekidan, an all-female musical revue. The gender-bending word play (echoed by the later appearance along the road of a female kabuki troupe, also from Tokyo) portrays the metropolis and the new sound cinema as representatives of a world of inverted values and new customs, one appropriate to *Mr. Thank You*'s transitional status, midway between silent cinema, on the one hand, and the world of Taki and the talkies, on the other. *Masseurs and a Woman* also alludes to transition in an especially beautiful scene in which Toku encounters the woman from Tokyo on the street. He does not see her, of course, but smells her as she teases him by retreating and watching from a distance. The scene is constructed as a succession of frontal views of the two characters as they face each other, but this is an atypical shot/reverse-shot sequence in which the camera's point of view can only parallel one of the two eyelines. Toku's sightless eyes move up and down and from side to side as he relies instead upon his nose. The scene accentuates sensory deprivation, the inability of Toku to see what we see, and our inability to smell what he smells. It is accompanied by a dramatic cinematic silence—the viewer only hears the hiss and noise of advancing film—that effectively suspends the scene between two eras of cinema.

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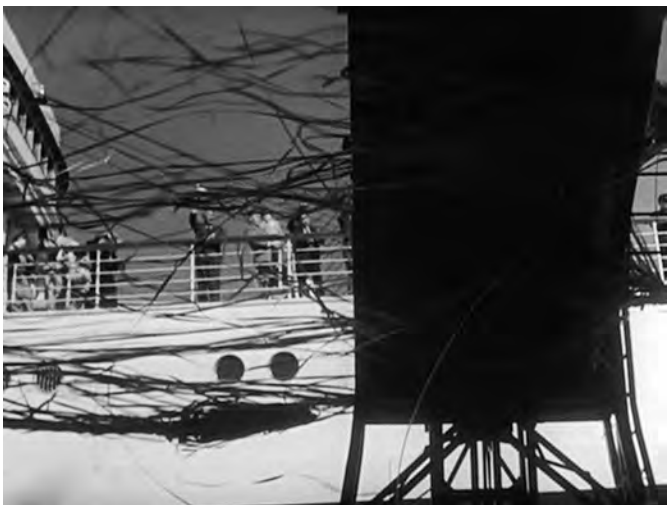
Congestion and delay are the traffic conditions in *Ornamental Hairpin*, the most accomplished film in the set. Amid groups of Buddhist pilgrims and vacationers who descend upon a mountain inn and overrun the facilities, a woman drops her hairpin in the baths, leading to a debilitating injury when a soldier (Chishu Ryu) later steps on it and is waylaid until he recovers. Over the course of his convalescence the inn becomes increasingly crowded, signaled by the growing number of futons crammed into each room. But this is a traffic jam that no one ultimately resents, least of all the soldier who is charmed by the rare object that has stopped him in his tracks (and for a soldier in Japan in 1941 such a furlough would have been especially meaningful). "The sole of my foot has been pierced by poetry," he says. The owner of the hairpin, Emi (Kinuyo Tanaka), is herself only too content to

MASSEURS AND A WOMAN

Masseurs and a Woman. © 1938 Shochiku Co. Ltd. DVD: Criterion Eclipse.

ORNAMENTAL HAIRPIN AND *JAPANESE GIRLS AT THE HARBOR*



Left: *Ornamental Hairpin*. © 1941 Shochiku Co. Ltd. Right: *Japanese Girls at the Harbor*. © 1933 Shochiku Co. Ltd. DVD: Criterion Eclipse.

be stuck nursing the injured man and to prolong her retreat from what appears, here again, to be a life as a kept woman in Tokyo. In contrast with *Mr. Thank You*, the general pattern of *Ornamental Hairpin* thus tends toward agreeable stasis.

But this relative fixity is not without dynamism. The soldier's recovery process, cheered on by two boys staying at the inn, introduces a linear narrative that threatens an end to the sojourn, a distressing prospect for Emi. The soldier will depart when he can walk again, and his increasing feats of locomotion (between trees, across a river on a footbridge, up a staircase) build momentum toward the road. The impatience of children (who are another favorite subject of Shimizu's and the theme of a second 2008 Shochiku boxed set awaiting U.S. release) adds another element of disturbance. The same two boys who encourage the soldier emphasize in their daily diary entries the circularity of life at the inn, where the same things happen every day. The boys also respond with protest when romantic interest between adults threatens to prolong the inertia and interfere with progress, even though romantic couples in fact never form in any kind of enduring way in these films. Romance is something for the road, and as a result something that never reaches its destination. Emi herself wants to remain in transit, and once the soldier has gone on his way she stays at the inn, walking in his footsteps as if to restage his progress along a more circular route, with no egress back to the city. Closing on the melancholy path traced by her feet, the film evokes the loneliness of delay without traffic.

Although *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* is somewhat distinct from the other films in the edition, it is in its own way preoccupied with travel. The setting is the international port of Yokohama, which in contrast to Tokyo is more of a gateway than a destination in its own right. It is also a place that reflects the influence of foreign ships, first of all in the hybridity of the "Eurasian" characters who have mixed features or English names (Dora, Henry, Yoko Sheridan). The film is a sensationally stylized melodrama of jealousy, murder, and redemption that occurs far away from the peripheral area of Japanese rural highways. Though the earliest of the films in the set, it is the most modern in terms of subject matter and setting. But the emblems of this modernity are also emblems of travel (ships, automobiles, motorbikes) or of cosmopolitanism (a rather expressionistic Christian church, sophisticated western clothing and home furnishings). The central character is Sunako (played by Michiko Oikawa), a woman once again adrift, who migrates from one port town to another seeking refuge from her past. *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* has the Shimizu trademarks of location shooting and an extravagantly mobile camera, and it displays too the director's fondness for rhyming and repetition, notably in the motif of a ball of yarn which rolls and winds its way symbolically through domestic space where the homemaker Dora knits with it before the more worldly Sunako dances indiscreetly with her husband Henry as it symbolically unwinds and tangles around their shuffling feet. At the end of the film, when Sunako embarks on a sea journey, the closing image of a ship's streamers twisting around the pier rhymes with the yarn, elegantly evoking the undoing not only of domesticity but also of the ties that have bound Sunako in her life at the ports.

The difference between the inert solidity of mountains and travel as movement or the freedom of not being tied to a place can be mapped onto a debate about Shimizu's status as an auteur. At Shochiku, where he began his career in 1924 and made 140 films, he was regarded as one of the studio's prewar mainstays. His friend and Shochiku colleague Yasujiro Ozu praised his talent and stressed the distinctiveness of his work, referring to a "Shimizu feel" (www.shochiku.co.jp/library/shimizu). But in later years he fell into neglect, overshadowed by the celebration of his better-known contemporaries. As Shimizu's films now appear on DVD, there is a new opportunity for reappraisal beyond the limits of archives and film festivals. Yet this deserved reassessment should not go too far in making static stylistic catalogs or in monumentalizing work that is by nature wandering and free. Keiko McDonald in *Word and Image in Japanese Cinema* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) has accounted for Shimizu's relative obscurity with reference to a certain "casualness" in his direction, especially by comparison with the meticulous approach of the "monstrous perfectionists" Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi (200). What the four films in the Criterion boxed set show is that Shimizu, with his predilections for the long take and camera movement, for improvisation and locations, and his tendency to balance poignant human drama with light humor, was a director whose style was fundamentally versatile and fluid—not so much monolithic as possessed of its own traveling spirit.

RYAN COOK is a Ph.D. candidate in Film Studies and Japanese Literature at Yale University.

DVD DATA *Travels with Hiroshi Shimizu* [*Japanese Girls at the Harbor, Mr. Thank You, Masseurs and a Woman, Ornamental Hairpin*]. Director: Hiroshi Shimizu. © 1933, 1936, 1938, 1941 Shochiku Co. Ltd. Publisher: Eclipse from the Criterion Collection. $59.95, 4 discs.

ABSTRACT A review of four films made on location by Hiroshi Shimizu from 1933–41 which considers the director's fondness for the road and his stylistic openness in relation to his use of formal motifs evoking travel.

KEYWORDS Hiroshi Shimizu, *Japanese Girls at the Harbor, Mr. Thank You, Masseurs and a Woman, Ornamental Hairpin*

ROSSELLINI'S PICTORIAL HISTORIES

DAVID FORGACS FOLLOWS THE ITALIAN DIRECTOR'S PATH FROM NEOREALISM TO TELEVISION DRAMA

The release by the Criterion Collection of two DVD boxed sets—*Roberto Rossellini's War Trilogy* and *Rossellini's History Films: Renaissance and Enlightenment*—reminds us of an important fact about the shape of Rossellini's career, namely that he moved from making films about the present or the very recent past to films about the distant past. His last completed feature was *The Messiah* (1975). It also raises a question about that move: what do the late historical films, made mainly for television, have in common with the neorealist films on which his international reputation was founded?

The later films still generally tend to be treated, as they were by most critics when they first appeared, like poor cousins of the early ones. The difference of treatment is reflected in these two DVD packages. Open the *War Trilogy* box and you find beautiful transfers of *Rome Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (*Paisà*, 1946), and *Germany Year Zero* (1948), together with the cornucopia of extras one has come to expect from Criterion. These include a forty-page booklet, original interviews, and video essays as well as copies of already existing documentaries and rarely seen archive film of Rossellini talking to students at Rice University in 1970. Peter Bondanella's audio commentary to *Rome Open City*, originally recorded for the 1995 laserdisc, is also included. In short, this is by far the best edition of these three films now available anywhere. By contrast, the *History Films* set, consisting of *The Age of the Medici* (three episodes, 1972), *Blaise Pascal* (1972), and *Cartesius* (1974)—all of them made for television—is released in Criterion's more economical Eclipse series, with no video extras, even though each disc has excellent sleeve notes by Rossellini's American biographer Tag Gallagher as well as subtitle and audio options. The same three films are released in France by Carlotta Films in the set *Une encyclopédie historique de Rossellini*, together with a fourth, *Augustine of Hippo* (1972). The Carlotta box does include some video extras, including an interview with Pierre Arditi, who played Pascal, and introductions by film scholar Aurore Renaut, but they are skimpier than those that Criterion has attached to the neorealist films.

If we try to define the essential differences between the early and late Rossellini we cannot really pin them down to the change of subject or genre, the move from contemporary stories to costume films or from black-and-white to color. Many American and British directors who, like Rossellini, made war features or propaganda films, also went on, as he did, after 1945 or 1946, to make other kinds of film, including comedies, melodramas, and costume pictures. If anything, Rossellini was unusual in sticking with World War II for as long as he did. At the beginning of *Stromboli* (1949) Karin (Ingrid Bergman) is in a Displaced Persons camp. In *Europe '51* (1952) Irene, played again by Bergman, whose young son Michel has died after throwing himself down the stairwell, is told by her Communist friend Andrea that the real cause of Michel's action was the war and bombing that had scarred his infancy. Rossellini would return several times to the war in his later films: *Il Generale Della Rovere* (1959—also available in a new transfer from the Criterion Collection and in Italy in a two-disc set from Minerva Classics), *Era notte a Roma* (*Blackout in Rome*, 1960) and the early part of *Anno Uno* (1974). In other words, he never really let go of the war, or it never quite let go of him.

DIFFERENCES

The most visible difference between early and late Rossellini lies in what seems to be a striking switch of style. The early postwar films, particularly *Paisan* and *Germany Year Zero*, are characterized, above all in their final parts, by a radical stripping out of dialogue. Spoken interactions between characters are replaced by a camera that observes isolated individuals moving silently across a landscape: panning to follow a dead partisan floating in a life belt down the Po river, tracking alongside the boy Edmund (Edmund Möschke) as he walks

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Filming *Germany Year Zero* in Berlin
Courtesy of Fondazione Rossellini, Rome.

past the rubble of Berlin before leaping to his death from an empty building. In both cases the places in which these figures move are also sites of memory. Rossellini recalled that the bodies of real partisans had remained afloat in the Po for weeks. The ruins of Berlin were a reminder of the terrible devastation wreaked by strategic bombing on the cities of Germany and of the death of over half a million German civilians, but they were also a visible sign of the internal damage done to the minds of the survivors. These shots, in which the images of the city are offset by a minimal music written by Rossellini's brother Renzo, seem to bear out Fellini's claim (in *Fare un film*, 1980) about Rossellini at this time having "an enormous trust in the things photographed." The camera records but it cannot explain. André Bazin wrote in his review of the film in 1949 that if we know anything about Edmund "it is never from signs that are directly readable on his face, not even from his behavior." Rossellini made *Germany Year Zero* while he was still grieving the death in 1946 of his nine-year-old son Romano, to whose memory it is dedicated, and he described the film in an interview with Fernaldo Di Giammatteo in November 1948, as "cold as a sheet of glass." He told the critic Mario Verdone in 1951 that it was sequences like these that constituted "the decisive moment" in his films and he claimed that the "narrative" parts were of much less interest to him. This spareness, the suspension of dialogue, and the concentration on a photographed landscape is repeated in the films he made with Ingrid Bergman: in Karin's slow walk up the volcano at the end of *Stromboli*, Irene's first encounter with the bleak housing project in Rome in *Europe '51*, Katherine's drives around Naples and her walks through Pompei or among the smoking craters of the Phlegraean Fields in *Journey to Italy* (1954).

If we now compare the style of *The Age of the Medici* or *Blaise Pascal* with these earlier films everything seems to have changed. Although large parts of the television films were shot, like Rossellini's earlier films, in real locations, they are locations that have been dressed up, as in a living museum, with period costumes and details: furniture, everyday objects, wall hangings in the interiors, horses and straw on the roads. This is true also of his later reconstructions of World War II. Whereas the bomb damage we see in *Rome Open City*, *Paisan*, and *Germany Year Zero* is real, that in *Il Generale*

Rossellini sets up a Schüfftan mirror shot for *Socrates* (1971)
Photo: Gianni Assenza. Courtesy of Fondazione Rossellini, Rome.

Della Rovere, shot entirely at Cinecittà, or in *Anno uno* is reconstructed. Moreover, in several outdoor scenes in his later films Rossellini uses what is known as a glass shot or Schüfftan mirror shot—an optical trick devised by cinematographer Eugen Schüfftan and first used in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). The technique is illustrated by Tag Gallagher in his wonderful video essay on Rossellini's *The Taking of Power by Louis XIV* (1966), also released by Criterion. The camera shoots through a piece of glass which is part clear, part mirror. A full-size built set or a real landscape in front of the camera, seen through the clear portion of the glass, is aligned in the viewfinder with the reflection, visible in the mirrored portion, of a model or painted set placed at a 45-degree angle behind the camera.

When Rossellini uses this technique the photographic image is no longer simply a record of a real profilmic location, as it was in his early postwar films, but a composite of a real place and an artificial set. In the two mirror shots with a painted Florence in the background in *The Age of the Medici*, unlike those with a painted Louvre or Versailles in the Louis XIV film, the disjunction between the painted and photographed parts of the image is very noticeable. The painted scene is eerily cradled in the real landscape.

The later films, finally, are in many scenes heavy on dialogue, and indeed on monologue delivered by the central characters, usually to one or more bystanders on screen, and they are deliberately instructional. Rossellini referred to his television films as *didattici* and, although the word in Italian has, like its Latin root, a more neutral connotation of teaching than the English "didactic," which suggests preaching, they do nevertheless at times possess a didactic quality in the English sense too. Take, for instance, the scene in *Blaise Pascal* where Pascal defends his argument, based on experimental proofs, that a vacuum can exist in nature against the belief, derived from the ancient Greeks, that this was impossible. A Jesuit scientist has been brought in to confute Pascal's claim by deftly restating the traditional view in modern terms. Pascal, in a speech lasting seven minutes, filmed in two long takes with one cut in the middle, demolishes the Jesuit's argument with a demonstration of the logical coherence of his own proof, in which his tone becomes increasingly triumphant. Or take the scene in the third episode of *The Age of*

ROME OPEN CITY AND *PAISAN*

Left: *Rome Open City*. © 1945 Cinecittà Luce, Renzo Rossellini, and Kramsie Ltd.
Right: *Paisan*. © 1946 Cinecittà Luce, Renzo Rossellini, and Kramsie Ltd. DVDs: Criterion Collection.

the Medici, about Leon Battista Alberti and humanism, where Alberti (Virgilio Gazzolo) and Ciriaco d'Arpaso (Michel Bardinet) stand in front of Masaccio's painting *The Holy Trinity* and explain it to a nun who objects to its newfangled depiction of God with the dimensions of a man. The scene is in effect—and was intended to be—a lecture in sound bites for a television audience in the history of art and ideas:

> CIRIACO: Masaccio's freedom is the freedom of mankind, for it is by our actions that we preserve our very autonomy. Unless you understand this the painting loses all its meaning.
>
> ALBERTI: No, Ciriaco, that is not a full enough explanation of this Holy Trinity. In addition to its astounding visual expressiveness, Mascaccio's art is the result of geometric laws, which he has applied to the new science of perspective. No painter or architect may ever again be free of these rules.
>
> NUN: Perspective, you say? What does that matter? Where is the magnificence of Christ?

The nun here is set up as a stooge to express the prejudices of medieval religiosity. "Tradition," Alberti admonishes her, "has always used the dogmas of the Church to emphasize human frailty." In *Blaise Pascal*, too, it is a woman, Blaise's sister Jacqueline, who expresses traditional beliefs. In an early sequence a local tradesman's servant, Michelle Martin (Anne Caprile), is accused of sorcery and brought to trial. Jacqueline tells Blaise that she herself believes in possession and witchcraft whereas Blaise tells her that such accusations may merely prove people's credulity and show that there are illnesses that can affect the mind and distort one's perceptions. The scene that follows is very disturbing. Michelle is carried into the courtroom on a stretcher because her legs have been broken under torture and, weeping, accuses herself and begs to be burned at the stake.

CONTINUITIES

The stylistic differences between the earlier and the later films are certainly substantial. They are to a great extent the result of Rossellini's conversion—the word is not too strong to describe it—during the 1960s to the belief that people in contemporary western society were being collectively seduced into passivity and ignorance, that their capacity to think critically was being blunted, that cinema had become an entertainment Moloch and that television, on the other hand, far from being an instrument of mass distraction, possessed enormous potential as a vehicle of popular teaching. He firmly believed that a television course in the west's great formative ideas and periods—Socratic philosophy, Christianity, the Renaissance and humanism, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, Marxism—would help people see with their own eyes and think critically about the world.

Nevertheless, there are also a number of continuities between Rossellini's earlier and later films, including stylistic ones, even if these are not always immediately obvious. One continuity is in the sobriety of technical means. From 1945 onward he avoided shots that were unnecessarily elaborate or beautiful for their own sake (beautiful shots, he wrote in 1955, "are the one thing that makes me sick") as well as complicated forms of narrative construction. His narrative style was essentially linear and episodic, with just a few exceptions, such as the flashback he uses in the third (Rome) episode of *Paisan* or the ellipsis in the final (Po Delta) episode. In the latter, we are not shown the actual reprisal massacre of the peasant family but only its aftermath. Bazin famously presented this, in his article of 1948, "Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation," as an example of Rossellini's respect for the real: it gave viewers a series of "image-facts" whose meaning they had to assemble for themselves. Yet it was really a deviation from Rossellini's normal manner of showing events in temporal sequence. When he moved to television he carried this sobriety even further, for economic reasons as well as aesthetic ones. It enabled him to work fast on low budgets, to shoot a feature-length film for television in just three weeks. He increased the use of long takes and of the motor-driven zoom lens, which he himself controlled from his director's chair using a remote control device mounted on a tripod. The zoom and the dolly allowed him to minimize post-production by changing setups and framings directly in the camera. Another continuity was in his use of untrained actors, whom he trusted to produce just the right kind of facial expression and vocal delivery. He worked with trained actors too, from Magnani to Bergman to Vittorio De Sica and others, but his use of "found actors" had started in his prewar films and it continued through *Paisan* and *The Flowers of Saint Francis*, made in 1950 (also now available in an excellent DVD transfer from both Criterion and Carlotta), to his casting of Jean-Marie Patte in *The Taking of Power by Louis XIV*. The diminutive Patte as Louis, draped in huge wigs, stares fixedly ahead, past his onscreen interlocutors, reading his lines from boards placed offscreen. As both Gallagher in his video essay and Colin MacCabe in the DVD booklet note, this "naïve" device works remarkably well to give Patte, as the Sun King, an almost otherworldly detachment and an uncanny authority over his court.

GERMANY YEAR ZERO AND *THE TAKING OF POWER BY LOUIS XIV*

Top two: *Germany Year Zero.* © 1948 Cinecittà Luce, Renzo Rossellini, and Kramsie Ltd.
Others: *The Taking of Power by Louis XIV.* © 1966/2008 INA. DVDs: Criterion Collection.

Adriano Aprà, the doyen of Rossellini studies in Italy, has made a strong case for seeing the late "didactic" films not as clunky attempts at television for the classroom but as radical forms of avant-garde experimentation. Aprà has argued that Rossellini was aiming to create a sort of virgin moving image, denuded of the sophisticated accretions of cinema, which he felt television as a young medium was equipped to provide. In this respect, Aprà claims, the television films sought to return film to its origins, to the conditions in which it had existed before the onset of what Noël Burch termed the Institutional Mode of Representation, but they did so using the very technologies that modern cinema had elaborated—such as the zoom lens and the mobile camera—and were thus able to unleash the full defamiliarizing potential of the "primitive" moving image within the high age of cinema. Among the features of Rossellini's neo-primitivism are the long take, frontal framing (characters stand against a background and the camera can follow them but not move around or behind them), the absence of offscreen space (what is on screen absorbs all of the spectator's attention), the abandonment of shot/reverse-shot cutting, the renunciation of all forms of dramatic construction based on suspense, the reduction to a minimum of relations of cause and effect between successive scenes—each scene stands on its own as a separate tableau—and openness to making mistakes.

FROM CINEMA TO TELEVISION

Regular television transmissions had resumed after the war in France and Britain and had begun in Italy in January 1954. One of the first films shown on Italian television, in February of that year, was *Rome Open City*. Rossellini did not elaborate his views about the educational mission of television until the early 1960s but already during the 50s he had started to express his disaffection with the cinema world. This world had at first feted him as a director of great talent and originality and had then, for the most part, rejected his films after 1949 as eccentric, too spiritual and aimless. The cineastes of the French New Wave were the most notable exception to this trend of rejection. For Rossellini an important turning point had come in 1959, when the thousands of feet of color film he had shot in various parts of India in 1956–57 with director of photography Aldo Tonti were shown as ten twenty-five-minute episodes on Italian and French television with his studio commentary. He used some of the same footage to cut the feature-length *India*, screened at Cannes in 1959 and then released in cinemas. In 1962 he famously announced at a press conference that "the cinema is dead" and he drew up plans to found a television production company that would make twenty-five educational films a year for four years. In fact, between 1965 (*The Iron Age*) and 1974 (*Cartesius*) he directed or supervised a total of eleven projects for television, several of them in multiple episodes and most of them co-produced by his company Orizzonte 2000 with the Italian or French public service networks. Sergio Trasatti calculated in his book *Rossellini e la televisione* (1978) that Rossellini's total television output had been forty hours, almost exactly the same as his total cinema output.

By the time of his death, following a heart attack, on June 3, 1977 at the age of seventy-one, Rossellini had already made several public repudiations of cinema—not just of a particular kind of cinema, but of all cinema. The most recent had been just a week before, when he had created a furore by persuading the Cannes Film Festival jury, of which he was president that year, to award the Palme d'Or to Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's *Padre Padrone*, a low-budget 16mm film produced by the Italian public television company RAI. The day after he died the Rome newspaper *Paese Sera* printed his unfinished article "A Diagnosis of Cinema after the Experience of Cannes." More than a diagnosis it was a post-mortem. Rossellini classified the contemporary *cinéma d'auteur* into three types: navel-gazing, superficially desecratory, narrowly political. He went on to observe that the structure of film production, distribution, and exhibition that had been in place for nearly eighty years had effectively broken down. Audiences were increasingly viewing films on television and film producers were begging governments to protect them instead of having the courage to take risks. Yet Rossellini also claimed that those in charge of public service television in Europe had become entertainment-oriented and lazy. In having the top festival prize awarded to a film made for television he wanted to give a slap in the face to complacent film industry executives, directors, and critics. But he also wanted to goad those responsible for television into fulfilling their remit to contribute to the social and cultural development of their countries.

If Rossellini's polemic now sounds as if it belongs to a remote era it is because he wrote it just when everything was about to change. He did not live to see these changes but we can be certain that he would have deplored them. In 1977 television in Europe was still dominated by state-run or state-regulated providers, home video was still in its infancy and film producers still concentrated most of their energies on theatrical releases. Yet already in 1976 the Constitutional Court in Italy had ruled that the RAI's monopoly of radio and television broadcasts was in conflict with the country's constitution, in force since 1948, which gave all citizens the right

CARTESIUS, THE AGE OF THE MEDICI, AND *BLAISE PASCAL*

Top left: *Cartesius*. © 2002 Istituto Luce—Roma. Next two: *The Age of the Medici*. © 2003 Istituto Luce—Roma.
Last three: *Blaise Pascal*. © 2003 Istituto Luce—Roma. DVD: Criterion Eclipse.

to express their opinions freely in speech and writing and by any other means. The ruling opened the door to private broadcasters to transmit at local level and then, by stealth, at national level too.

In 1978 Silvio Berlusconi founded his first media corporation, Fininvest, and in 1980 he launched a national television network, Canale 5. By 1984 he controlled Italy's three main private networks. In the decade that followed, the RAI increasingly adapted its schedules to compete with Fininvest for audience ratings and advertising revenue. In France, too, where the state monopoly broadcaster ORTF had co-produced several of Rossellini's television films, privatization began in the 1980s. Europe's first terrestrial pay-TV channel, Canal Plus, was launched there in 1984. The ideal of public service television to which Rossellini had been committed, one geared to the transmission of ideas, which stimulated an audience to think and expand its knowledge, would become almost nonexistent in Italy. It would survive in the rest of Europe only in a few enclaves of "cultural" television: for instance in parts of the schedules of the BBC and Channel Four in Britain, ARTE in France and Germany. Yet it is to that former era, when cinema and television were still separate spheres and when television in Europe was a state monopoly, that Rossellini belonged. And it is only in the context of that era that one can fully understand the trajectory of his career, with his gradual repudiation of cinema and then his increasing dissatisfaction also with television.

WHICH HISTORY?

If Rossellini's historical films belong to a particular moment in European television they also belong to a specific moment in the study of history. Already between the world wars historians in France associated with the periodical *Annales* had started to develop a set of approaches to the past influenced by anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Marc Bloch's *Les Rois thaumaturges*, first published in 1924, examined the popular belief, documented in Europe from the early middle ages to the late eighteenth century, that attributed to kings the power to cure scrofula by laying their hands on a patient. By the early 1960s the idea that one could produce accounts of the past consisting not of narratives of events but of reconstructions of popular beliefs (mentalities) and people's use of everyday objects (material culture) was well established, as was the idea that it was more appropriate to deal with these things over a long period (*la longue durée*) than in the shorter slices of time normally adopted by political historians. One also needed to draw on a wide variety of sources, from paintings and literary texts to local taxation records and the transcripts of trials for heresy and witchcraft. Some social historians in other countries had also begun to argue for the importance of reconstructing history from below, that is to say from the standpoint of the lower classes, taking account of the testimonies of people with little formal education, including, in the case of recent events, oral history. The same year, 1966, in which Rossellini made *The Taking of Power by Louis XIV* Carlo Ginzburg published his first book, *The Night Battles* (*I benandanti*), and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie published *Les Paysans de Languedoc*. E. J. Hobsbawm had already written *Primitive Rebels* (1959) and E. P. Thomson had published *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). At the same time a postcolonial history of Africa was starting to emerge, produced by African historians such as Albert Adu Boahen and Cheikh Anta Diop as well as by Europeans like Basil Davidson and Richard Pankhurst. Feminist history would come soon after. Sheila Rowbotham's *Women, Resistance and Revolution* appeared in 1972, the year of Rossellini's *The Age of the Medici*.

Rossellini's historical films have a more complex relationship to these changes in the study and writing of history than has generally been acknowledged. At one level they appeared to be, and perhaps were, simply out of touch with them. They seem to cling to a more old-fashioned view in which the past is organized around the biographies of great men: the founders or developers of religious movements (*Acts of the Apostles* [1969], *The Messiah*, *Augustine of Hippo*), inventors, philosophers, and scientists (Socrates, Pascal, Descartes), political leaders (Garibaldi in *Viva l'Italia* [1960]; Alcide De Gasperi, Italy's postwar prime minister, in *Anno Uno*). The civilization of the Renaissance is epitomized by one of its elite families, the Medici, and a prominent architectural theorist, Alberti. Rossellini's vision of history is also strongly Eurocentric. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith pointed out in "North and South, East and West, Rossellini and Politics" (*Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*), his idea of civilization was centered in the first instance on the Mediterranean, as cradle of the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman civilizations. From there western civilization had spread, through the European middle ages and the Renaissance, the scientific revolutions in Britain, Germany, France, and Italy, the Enlightenment and the industrial and technological revolutions. It is true that Rossellini planned to make films also about the history of Islam, the colonization of Central and South America, and the American Revolution, but he saw these too as ramifications of Mediterranean or European culture. His television project did not include films about the indigenous civilisations and cultures of Asia (including China and the Indian subcontinent, despite the ethnographic interest he had shown in India when he went there in the late

1950s) or Australia and the pre-Columbian Americas. The only exceptions seem to have been projects for films about the history of Japan, which he mentioned in an interview of January 1970 in *Nuestro Cine* with Francisco Llinás and Miguel Marías, and for a modern film about the life of Mao Zedong, as well as the inclusion in *The Iron Age* of a scene of a Chinese alchemist working in a Franciscan monastery.

And yet there are several aspects in Rossellini's history films that do have affinities with the new historiography. Firstly, they demonstrate a consistent interest in long evolutionary processes, and in particular in the developments of ideas and technologies over several centuries. This is most evident in his two long-range projects, *The Iron Age* in five episodes (conceived and written by Rossellini but directed by his son Renzo in 1964) and *Man's Struggle for Survival* in twelve episodes (made in 1967–69, broadcast in 1970). But it is also apparent in the way other individual films fit together into groups and these in turn make up a single encyclopedic project. Alberti, Pascal, and Descartes exemplify, respectively, a series of stages in the emancipation of the mathematical and physical sciences from revealed religion, and in the emergence of modern rationalist thought. Secondly, there is his interest in the history of objects—particularly tools, machines, scientific and medical instruments—and in the history of surgical methods and treatments. The inventions include Pascal's calculating machine and Alberti's intersector—a box, similar to a camera lucida, which he designed as an aid to drawing in perspective. The treatments include the making of a splint for Pascal's father Étienne (Giuseppe Addobbati) when he breaks his leg. The servants stand chewing and spitting out borage, which is immediately applied to the broken leg as a cold poultice. The leg is then wrapped in branches of herbs and splinted with bark and string. Thirdly, there is his sustained fascination with the materiality of past cultures: in details of clothing—there are several scenes of dressing and undressing in costumes with complicated fastenings—and in obsolete social rituals and practices, such as the queen clapping her hands in front of the courtiers during the levée in the king's bedchamber in *The Taking of Power* to indicate that Louis has performed his conjugal duty. One of the most striking scenes in the same film comes near the beginning where the physicians enter the room in which Cardinal Mazarin lies dying and one of them sniffs the air to diagnose the foul smell. He then sniffs Mazarin's sweat and his chamberpot and prescribes a further bloodletting.

Peter Burke, one of the exemplars of the new cultural history and author of *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (1994), argued in his book *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (2001) that Rossellini's film was a remarkable piece of visual history both because of its concern with everyday life at a time when this was not yet taken seriously by professional historians and for its concentration on Louis's use of the "theatre of the court" at Versailles to tame the nobility. The film, for Burke, is a brilliant visualization of this aspect of Louis's power because it employs "spectacle as a means of analysing spectacle, its political uses and effects." The painterly color tableaux and extraordinary chiaroscuro lighting, under the direction of Georges Leclerc, who had been director of photography on Renoir's films of the late 1950s and early 60s, are wholly functional to this emphasis on spectacle.

Filming *Cartesius* in Italy
Photo: Gianni Assenza. Courtesy of Fondazione Rossellini, Rome.

These aspects of Rossellini's history films are evident continuations of his earlier films. The splinting of the leg in *Blaise Pascal* and the sniffing of the urine in *The Taking of Power by Louis XIV* are forgotten practices, and the performance of them involves a purely speculative reconstruction, but they are filmed with a similar observational attention to detail as the scene in the last episode of *Paisan* where a peasant kills live eels with a circular motion of his knife, an action he must have performed many times in reality, to serve for lunch to his guest, the American intelligence officer Dale (Dale Edmonds). In both cases the implication is that these rituals are an important part of the culture of that community, part of what defines it as such, and therefore worthy of record. Just as the late films embody a dualism of high and

low history, the deeds or thoughts of exceptional individuals alongside the everyday actions of ordinary people, so too did the early films portray the deeds of "heroes" like Manfredi (Marcello Pagliero) and Don Pietro (Aldo Fabrizi) in *Rome Open City* alongside observations of the daily hardships of wartime, like the women looting a bakery to provide for their families or the sacristan Agostino (Nando Bruno) boiling cabbage on the priest's stove.

THE PARADOX OF PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE

When Rossellini and his co-screenwriters began to develop *Rome Open City* in the autumn of 1944 the actual events to which it alluded—including the shooting of a woman in the street as she tried to approach her husband, taken away in a round-up by the Germans, and the execution of a priest who had helped the resistance—had occurred in Rome just a few months before. In the case of the execution of Don Pietro, Rossellini filmed it in the same military camp, Forte Bravetta, where Don Giuseppe Morosini had been shot by firing squad on April 3, 1944, and this gave the sequence a photographic authenticity and a value as testimony far greater than any reconstruction of the same event in a different location could have had.

Yet the film, by the standards of Rossellini's later work, as well as in his own retrospective judgment, was also false. It used devices of empathetic involvement—such as the cross-cutting in the execution scene between the faces of the boys behind the wire fence (filmed in fact at another location, not Forte Bravetta), that of Don Pietro, and the nervous Italians in the firing squad—that he would later find crudely manipulative. It was also false overall as a historical record. This was not so much a matter of its misrepresentations in the staging of events, since Rossellini never claimed that his stagings were fully accurate reconstructions, even when the locations themselves were authentic. The falsity came, rather, from the film's ideological reshaping of the recent past, its selections, omissions, and elisions of events. It played up the alliance between different groups within the resistance movement, the positive role of the Church, and the stories of heroes and martyrs; it played down the political divisions among antifascists, the role of spies, and Italian fascists, and left out the worst actions and war crimes perpetrated by the Germans during the nine months of their occupation of Rome. The most notable omissions were the deportation to Nazi death camps of more than two thousand Jewish citizens between October 1943 and May 1944 and the massacre of the Fosse Ardeatine on March 24, 1944, where 335 civilians, fifty-seven of whom were Jewish, were murdered by order of the SS in reprisal for the bomb attack against a German police division the day before in Via Rasella. For all the positive portrayal of the Communist, Manfredi, the values of Christian charity held up by Don Pietro are probably the dominant ones in the film. He is even allowed to suggest to Pina (Anna Magnani) that the war may be a rebuke to an oversecularized society for its neglect of God. This links up with the theme of the corruption of the worldly city, the *civitas terrena*, that will be expressed by Augustine (Dary Berkany) in *Augustine of Hippo*.

Photographic authenticity was thus combined by Rossellini with ideological fabrication. Yet, as his depictions of Rome in the war moved further in time from the events, first in *Blackout in Rome* then in *Anno uno*, and as the possibility of a literal photographic record of wartime Rome receded, new layers of historical memory were exposed to the surface and with them the possibility of new representations of the city in wartime. *Blackout in Rome*, like *Il Generale Della Rovere* (which is set in Genoa and Milan), was shot entirely in studio sets and indeed much of its action is confined to an attic. However, the narrative generates a sharp sense of a city pervaded by fear of spies and informers, the latter embodied particularly in the character of Tarcisio. It is also a film where news comes through on the radio (in a monastery) of the massacre at the Fosse Ardeatine. If *Rome Open City* was a powerful, but in some ways detraumatized, filmic account of the war in Rome—detraumatized because it excluded these problematic memories—then *Blackout in Rome* retraumatizes the account by bringing those memories back. This is true also of *Anno uno*, where the noise of the Via Rasella bomb and the news of the subsequent Fosse Ardeatine massacre figure in the early part of the film.

As these examples demonstrate, a historical film may require distance from the events it represents in order to problematize them and thus present them in a relatively more truthful way. It would not have been impossible in 1945 to depict the political divisions among antifascists or the deportation and massacre of civilians but it would have been ideologically inappropriate, too negative for a film about popular unity and heroism. For similar reasons, not to have alluded to these divisions in 1974, when Italian politics had been polarized for over twenty-five years between Christian Democrats and Communists, would have been seen as an inappropriate and unconvincing omission. Not surprisingly, Rossellini's most explicitly ideological films were the ones he made during the war itself under commission from the Italian armed forces—what is sometimes referred to as his Fascist war trilogy, consisting of *La nave bianca* (*The White*

Filming *The Taking of Power by Louis XIV* in France
Courtesy of Fondazione Rosselini, Rome.

Ship, 1941), *Un pilota ritorna* (*A Pilot Returns*, 1942), and *L'uomo dalla croce* (*Man with a Cross*, 1943). Conversely, the films that are set back in a remote past, like *The Taking of Power by Louis XIV*, *The Age of the Medici*, *Cartesius*, or *Blaise Pascal*, involve much speculative reconstruction and invention, and some falsification of the historical record, but they also have an observational engagement with the ideas and value systems of the past that gives them extraordinary power as historical representations.

More than thirty years have now passed since Rossellini's death. The media system against which he railed so acrimoniously, and wished to harness to new uses, has changed profoundly; so has our collective understanding of history and its processes. The relative stature of his later films continues to be called into question, as it was during his lifetime. Yet his greatness as a director can be seen throughout his work: in the restraint of his style, in his constant interest in people and material culture, and in the deeply compelling way in which, in scorn of fashion or celebrity, he remained true to an idea that filmmaking could comment on the world and provoke audiences to both emotion and reflection.

DAVID FORGACS holds the established Chair of Italian at University College London. He is the author of *Rome Open City* in the BFI Film Classics series and co-editor, with Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Sarah Lutton, of *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real* (BFI Publishing, 2000). In September 2011 he is taking up the newly endowed Guido and Mariuccia Zerilli-Marimò chair in Contemporary Italian Studies at New York University.

DVD DATA *Roberto Rossellini's War Trilogy* [*Rome Open City, Paisan, Germany Year Zero*]. Director: Roberto Rossellini, 1945, 1946, 1948. © Cinecittà Luce, Renzo Rossellini, and Kramsie Ltd. Publisher: The Criterion Collection. $79.95, 3 discs.

Rossellini's History Films: Renaissance and Enlightenment [*The Age of the Medici, Cartesius, Blaise Pascal*]. Director: Roberto Rossellini, 1972, 1974, 1972. © 2003, 2002, 2003 Istituto Luce—Roma. Publisher: Eclipse from the Criterion Collection. $59.95, 4 discs.

The Taking of Power by Louis XIV. Director: Roberto Rossellini, 1966. © 1966/2008 INA. Publisher: The Criterion Collection. $29.95, 1 disc.

ABSTRACT A survey of Roberto Rossellini's filmmaking career with particular emphasis on the continuities and differences between the World War II films of his early career and the later dramatization of an older scientific, religious, and political history.

KEYWORDS Roberto Rossellini, *Rome Open City, Paisan, Blaise Pascal, The Taking of Power by Louis XIV*

THE LOST UNCONSCIOUS: DELUSIONS AND DREAMS IN *INCEPTION*

MARK FISHER EXPLORES CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S LABYRINTHINE THRILLER

In Christopher Nolan's breakthrough memory-loss thriller *Memento* from 2000, the traumatized and heavily tattooed protagonist Lenny (Guy Pearce) has a suggestive conversation with a detective (Joe Pantoliano):

> TEDDY: Look at your police file. It was complete when I gave it to you. Who took the twelve pages out?
> LEONARD: You, probably.
> TEDDY: No, you took them out.
> LEONARD: Why would I do that?
> TEDDY: To set yourself a puzzle you won't ever solve.

Like Lenny, Nolan himself has specialized in setting puzzles that can't be solved. Duplicity—in the sense of both deception and doubling—runs right through his work. It's not only the case that Nolan's work is *about* duplicity; it is itself duplicitious, drawing audiences into labyrinths of indeterminacy.

Nolan's films have a coolly obsessive quality, in which a number of repeating elements—a traumatized hero and his antagonist; a dead woman; a plot involving manipulation and dissimulation—are reshuffled. These tropes from film noir are then further scrambled in the manner of a certain kind of neo-noir. Nolan acknowledges *Angel Heart* (1987) and *The Usual Suspects* (1995) as touchstones (he mentions both in an interview included on the *Memento* DVD, singling out the former as a particular inspiration), but one can also see parallels with the meta-detective fictions of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Paul Auster. There's a shift from the epistemological problems posed by unreliable narrators to a more general ontological indeterminacy, in which the nature of the whole fictional world is put into doubt.

Memento remains emblematic in this respect. At first glance, the film's enigma resolves relatively simply. Lenny, who suffers from anterograde amnesiac condition which means that he can't make new memories, is setting puzzles for himself that can't be solved so that he can always be pursuing his wife's murderer, long after Lenny has killed him. But after repeated viewings, the critic Andy Klein—in a piece for *Salon* pointedly entitled "Everything You Wanted to Know about *Memento*"—conceded that he wasn't "able to come up with the 'truth' about what transpired prior to the film's action. Every explanation seems to involve some breach of the apparent 'rules' of Leonard's disability—not merely the rules as he explains them, but the rules as we witness them operating throughout most of the film" (www.salon.com/entertainment/movies/feature/2001/06/28/memento_analysis). The rules are crucial to Nolan's method. If *Memento* is a kind of impossible object, then its impossibility is generated not via an anything-goes ontological anarchy but by the setting up of rules which it violates in particular ways.

Nolan nevertheless maintains that, however intractable his films might appear, they are always based on a definitive truth. As he said of *Inception* in an interview with *Wired*: "I've always believed that if you make a film with ambiguity, it needs to be based on a true interpretation. If it's not, then it will contradict itself, or it will be somehow insubstantial and end up making the audience feel cheated. Ambiguity has to come from the inability of the character to know—and the alignment of the audience with that character" (www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2011/01/play/inception-director-lives-the-dream). When the interviewer Robert Capps put it to Nolan that there might be several explanations of the film's ending, that the "right answer" is impossible to find, the director flatly contradicted him: "Oh no, I've got an answer." But Nolan's remarks may only be another act of misdirection; if a century of cultural theory has taught us anything, it's that an author's supposed intentions can only ever constitute a supplementary (para)text, never a final word. What are Nolan's films about, after all, but the instability of any master position? They are full of moments in which the manipulator—the one who looks, writes, or narrates—becomes the

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Chthonic castles

Inception. Photo: Melissa Moseley. © 2010 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

manipulated—the object of the gaze, the character in a story written or told by someone else.

In *Inception*, Cobb (Leonardo DiCaprio) is an "extractor," an expert at a special kind of industrial espionage, which involves entering into people's dreams and stealing their secrets. He and his team have been hired by hyperwealthy businessman Saito (Ken Watanabe) to infiltrate the dreams of Robert Fischer (Cillian Murphy), the heir to a massive energy conglomerate. This time Cobb's team isn't required to extract information, but to do something which the film tells us is much more difficult: they're tasked with implanting—"incepting"—an idea into Fischer's mind. It's not revealed until later that Cobb has some previous experience of inception.

Cobb's effectiveness as a dream thief is compromised by the "projection" of his dead wife, Mal (Marion Cotillard), the pathological stain he now brings with him into any dream caper. Mal died after she and Cobb set up a romantic retreat in the "unconstructed dreamspace" that the dream thieves call "limbo." But after she became too attached to this virtual love nest, Cobb successfully "incepted" in her the idea that the world in which they were living wasn't real. As Cobb mordantly observes, there's nothing more resilient than an idea and even when Mal is restored to her original world (which is presumably reality, though it's impossible to know for sure), she remains obsessed with the implanted notion. So she throws herself from a hotel window in order to return to what she believes is the real world. *Inception* turns on how Cobb deals with this traumatic event—in order to incept Fischer, he has first of all to descend into limbo and defeat Mal. He achieves this by simultaneously accepting his part in her death and by repudiating the Mal projection as an inadequate copy of his dead wife. With the disruptive projection vanquished and the dream heist successfully completed, Cobb is finally able to return to the children from whom he has been separated. Yet this ending has more than a suggestion of wish-fulfillment fantasy about it, and the suspicion that Cobb might be marooned somewhere in a multilayered oneiric labyrinth, a psychotic who has mistaken dreams for reality, makes *Inception* deeply ambiguous. "I choose to believe that Cobb gets back to his kids," Nolan told Robert Capps, but this doesn't settle the matter. The film's last image is of a little spinning top rotating on a side table in the family home. This object is Cobb's unique personal "totem" that allows him to distinguish between dream and reality: if it spins without falling, then he's in a dream. If it falls, then he's not.

Nolan's films are preoccupied with, to paraphrase *Memento*'s Teddy, the lies that we tell ourselves to stay happy. Yet the situation is worse even than that. It's one thing to lie to oneself; it's another to not even know whether one is lying to oneself or not. This might be the case with Cobb in *Inception*, and it's notable that, in the *Wired* interview, Nolan says: "The most important emotional thing about the top spinning at the

end is that Cobb is not looking at it. He doesn't care." Not caring whether we're lying to ourselves may be the price for happiness—or at least the price one pays for release from excruciating mental anguish. In this respect, Will Dormer (Al Pacino) in *Insomnia* (2002) could be thought of as the anti-Cobb. His inability to sleep—which naturally also means an inability to dream—correlates with the breakdown of his capacity to tell himself a comforting story about who he is. After the shooting of his partner, Dormer's identity collapses into a terrifying epistemological void, a black box that can't be opened. He simply doesn't know whether or not he intended to kill his partner, just as Alfred Borden (Christian Bale) in *The Prestige* (2006, adapted from a novel by Christopher Priest) can't remember for sure which knot he tied on the night of a fatally bungled escapology act. In Nolan's worlds, it's not only that we deceive ourselves; it's also that we're deceived about even having an authentic self. There's no separating identity from fiction. In *Memento*, Lenny literally writes (on) himself, but the very fact that he can write a script for future versions of himself to read is a horrifying demonstration of his lack of any coherent identity—a revelation that his Sisyphian quest both exemplifies and is in flight from. *Inception* leaves us with the possibility that Cobb's quest and apparent rediscovery of his children could be a version of the same kind of loop: a purgatory to *Memento*'s inferno.

It's not at all surprising that Nolan has adapted Priest, since there are striking parallels between the two men's methods and interests. "The urge to rewrite ourselves as real-seeming fictions is present in us all," writes Priest in *The Glamour* (1984). Priest's novels are also puzzles that can't be solved, in which writing, biography, and psychosis slide into one another, posing troubling ontological questions about memory, identity, and fiction. The idea explored in *Inception* of minds as datascapes which can be infiltrated inevitably recalls the "consensual hallucination" of William Gibson's cyberspace, but the dream-sharing concept can be traced back to Priest's *A Dream of Wessex*. In that extraordinary 1977 novel, a group of researcher volunteers use a "dream projector" to enter into a shared dream of a (then) future England. Like the dream-sharing addicts we briefly glimpse in one of *Inception*'s most disturbing scenes, some of the characters in *A Dream of Wessex* inevitably prefer the simulated environment to the real world, and, unlike Cobb, they choose to stay there. The differences in the way that the concept of shared dreaming is handled in 1977 and 2010 tell us a great deal about politics then and now—the contrasts, in short, between social democracy and neoliberalism. While *Inception*'s dream-sharing technology is—like the Internet—a military invention turned into a commercial application, Priest's shared dream project is government-run. The Wessex dream world is lyrical and languid, still part of the hazy afterglow of 1960s psychedelia. It's all a far cry from *Inception*'s noise and fury, the mind as a militarized zone.

Doubling and rivalry

From top: *Insomnia*. © 2002 Insomnia Productions LP. DVD: Buena Vista Home Entertainment (U.K.). *The Prestige*. © 2006 Warner Bros. Entertainment Corp./ Touchstone Pictures. DVD: Warner Home Video. *Batman Begins*. © 2005 Patalex III Productions Ltd. DVD: Warner Home Video. *The Dark Knight*. © 2008 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. DVD: Warner Home Video.

Inception synthesizes the intellectual and metaphysical puzzles of *Memento* and *The Prestige* with the big-budget ballistics of *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008). The synthesis isn't always satisfactory, the problem being the prolonged action sequences, which come off as perfunctory at best. At points, it's as if *Inception*'s achievement is merely to have provided a baroquely sophisticated motivation for the oddly half-hearted chasing and shooting. An unsympathetic viewer might think that the entirety of *Inception*'s complex ontological structure had been built to justify clichés of action cinema—such as the ludicrous amount of things that characters can do in the time that it takes for a van to fall from a bridge into a river. Blogger Carl Neville complains that *Inception* amounts to "three uninvolving action movies playing out simultaneously" (theimpostume.blogspot.com/2010/07/inception-takes-long-time-get-going-and.html). "What could have been a fascinatingly vertiginous trip into successively fantastic, impossible worlds, not to mention the limbo of the raw unconscious into which a couple of the central characters plunge," Neville argues, "ends up looking wholly like a series of action movies, one within the other: 'reality' looks and feels like a 'globalization' movie, jumping from Tokyo to Paris to Mombasa to Sydney with a team of basically decent technical geniuses who are forced to live outside the law, making sure there are lots of helicopter shots of cityscapes and exotic local colour. Level one dream is basically The Bourne Identity . . . rainy, grey, urban. Level two is the Matrix, zero gravity fistfights in a modernist hotel, level three, depressingly, turns out to be a Seventies Bond film while the raw Id is basically just a collapsing cityscape." The "level three" snow scenes at least resemble one of the most visually striking Bond films—1969's *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*— but it's hard not to share Neville's sense of anticlimax. Rather than picking up pace and ramping up the metaphysical complexity, the film rushes toward its disappointing denouement. The elaborate setup involving the "dream architect" Ariadne (Ellen Page) is summarily abandoned as she is told to forget the labyrinth and "find the most direct route through." When Ariadne and the film accede to these demands, it's as if the imperatives of the action thriller have crashed through the intricacies of Nolan's puzzle narrative with all the subtlety of the freight train that erupts into the cityscape in an earlier scene.

Neville is right that *Inception* is very far from being a "fascinatingly vertiginous trip into successively fantastic, impossible worlds," but it's worth thinking about why Nolan exercised such restraint. (His parsimony couldn't contrast more starkly with the stylistic extravagances of something like Peter Jackson's *The Lovely Bones* from 2009, which aims at the fantastic and the impossible, but ends up CGI-onanistic rather than lyrically oneiric.) One initially strange thing about *Inception* is how *undreamlike* the dreams in the film are. It's tempting to see the Nolan of *Inception* as a reverse Hitchcock—where Hitchcock took de Chirico-like dream topographies and remotivated them as thriller spaces, Nolan takes standard action-flick sequences and repackages them as dreams. Except in a scene where the walls seem to close in around Cobb when he's being pursued—which, interestingly, takes place in the film's apparent reality—the spatial distortions at work in *Inception* don't resemble the ways in which dreams distend or collapse space. There are none of the bizarre adjacencies or distances that don't diminish that we see in Welles's *The Trial* (1962), a film which, perhaps better than any other, captures the uncanny topographies of the anxiety dream. When, in one of *Inception*'s most remarked-upon scenes, Ariadne causes the Paris city space to fold up around herself and Cobb, she's behaving more like the CGI engineer who's creating the scene than any dreamer. This is a display of technical prowess, devoid of any charge of the uncanny. The limbo scenes, meanwhile, are like an inverted version of Fredric Jameson's "surrealism without the unconscious": this is an unconscious without surrealism. The world that Cobb and Mal create out of their memories is like a Powerpoint presentation of a love affair rendered as some walkthrough simulation: faintly haunting in its very lack of allure, quietly horrifying in its solipsistic emptiness. Where the unconscious was, there CGI shall be.

In an influential blog post, Devin Faraci argues that the whole film is a metaphor for cinematic production itself: Cobb is the director, Cobb's partner Arthur (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) the producer, Ariadne the screenwriter, Saito "the big corporate suit who fancies himself a part of the game," Fischer the audience. "Cobb, as a director, takes Fischer through an engaging, stimulating and exciting journey," Faraci argues, "one that leads him to an understanding about himself. Cobb is the big time movie director . . . who brings the action, who brings the spectacle, but who also brings the meaning and the humanity and the emotion" (www.chud.com/24477/never-wake-up-the-meaning-and-secret-of-inception/). In fact, as a director Cobb is something of a mediocrity (far less accomplished than Nolan)—as Neville argues, Fischer's "journey" takes him through a series of standard-issue action set pieces, which are "engaging, stimulating and exciting" only in some weakly generic way. Significantly and symptomatically, Faraci's hyperbole here sounds as if it might belong in a marketing pitch for Cobb and his team; just as when Cobb and the others eulogize the "creativity" of the dream-architecture process—*you can create worlds that never existed!*—they sound like they're reciting advertising copy or the script from a corporate video. The scenes in which the team prepare for Fischer's inception might have been designed to bring out

THE TROUBLE WITH MAL

Inception. © 2010 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc./Legendary Pictures. DVD: Warner Home Video.

the depressing vacuousness of the concept of the "creative industries." They play like a marketing team's own fantasies about what it does. *Inception* is less a meta-meditation on the power of cinema than, more interestingly, a reflection of the way in which cinematic techniques have become imbricated into a banal spectacle which—fusing business machismo, entertainment protocols, and breathless hype—enjoys an unprecedented dominion over our working lives and our dreaming minds.

It's no doubt this sense of pervasive mediation, of generalized simulation, that tempts Faraci into claiming that: "*Inception* is a dream to the point where even the dream-sharing stuff is a dream. Dom Cobb isn't an extractor. He can't go into other people's dreams. He isn't on the run from the Cobol Corporation. At one point he tells himself this, through the voice of Mal, who is a projection of his own subconscious. She asks him how real he thinks his world is, where he's being chased across the globe by faceless corporate goons." The moment when Mal confronts Cobb with all this is reminiscent of the scene in Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* (1990) where a psychiatrist attempts to persuade Arnold Schwarzenegger's Quaid that he's having a psychotic breakdown. But while *Total Recall* presents us with a strong distinction between Quaid's quotidian identity as a construction worker and his life as a secret agent at the center of an interplanetary struggle—a distinction that the film very quickly unsettles—*Inception* gives us only Cobb the generic hero: handsome, dapper, yet troubled. If, as Faraci claims, Cobb isn't an extractor and he isn't on the run from faceless corporate goons, then who is he? The true Cobb would then be an unrepresented X, outside the film's reality labyrinth—the empty figure who identifies with (and as) Cobb the commercially constructed fiction; ourselves, in other words, insofar as we're successfully interpellated by the film.

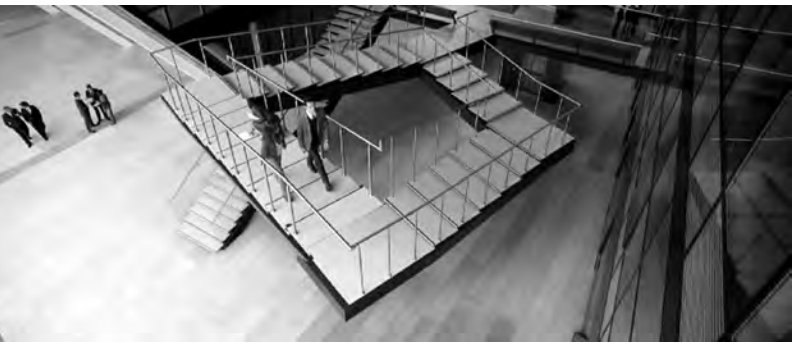
This leads to another difference between *Inception* and its Philip K. Dick-inspired 1980s and 90s precursors such as *Total Recall*, *Videodrome* (1983), and *eXistenZ* (1999). There's very little of the "reality bleed," the confusion of ontological hierarchy, that defined those films: throughout *Inception*, it's surprisingly easy for both the audience and the characters to remember where they are in the film's ontological architecture. When Ariadne is being trained by Arthur, she's taken round a virtual model of the impossible Penrose Steps. On the face of it, however, *Inception* is remarkable for its seeming failure to explore any paradoxical Escheresque topologies. The four different reality levels remain distinct, just as the causality between them remains well-formed. But this apparently stable hierarchy might be violated by the object upon which much of the discussion of the film's ending has centered: the top, the totem that Cobb ostensibly uses to determine whether he's in waking reality or not. Many have noted the inadequacy of this supposed proof. At best, it can only establish that Cobb isn't in his "own" dream, for what's there to stop his dreaming mind simulating the properties of the real top? Besides, in the film's chronology, the top—that ostensible token of the empirical actual—first of all appears as a *virtual* object, secreted by Mal inside a doll's house in limbo. And a totem, it should be remembered, is an object of faith (it's worth noting in passing that there are many references to faith throughout the film).

The association of the top with Mal is suggestive. Both Mal and the totem represent competing versions of reality. For Cobb, the top stands in for the Anglo-Saxon empiricist tradition's account of what reality is—something sensible, tangible. Mal, by contrast, represents a psychoanalytic Real—a trauma that disrupts any attempt to maintain a stable sense of reality; that which the subject cannot help bringing with him no matter where he goes. (Mal's malevolent, indestructible persistence recalls the sad resilience of the projections which haunt the occupants of the space station in Tarkovsky's 1972 *Solaris*.) No matter what reality level Cobb is on, Mal and the top are always there. But where the top supposedly belongs to the highest reality level, Mal belongs to the lowest level, the lover's limbo which Cobb repudiated.

Mal conflates two roles that had been kept separate in Nolan's films—the antagonist double and the grief object. In Nolan's debut, *Following* (1998), the antagonist double of the unnamed protagonist is the thief who shares his name with *Inception*'s hero. The role of the antagonist double is nowhere more apparent than in *Insomnia* and *The Dark Knight*, films which are in many ways *about* the proximity between the ostensible hero and his beyond-good-and-evil rival. *The Prestige*, meanwhile, is in effect a film in which there's a defining antagonism but no single protagonist: by the end of the film, the illusionists Robert Angier (Hugh Jackman) and Borden are doubled in multiple ways, just as they are defined and destroyed by their struggle with one another. More often than not, grief is the source of these antagonistic doublings. Grief itself is a puzzle that can't be solved and there's a certain (psychic) economy in collapsing the antagonist into the grief object, since the work of grief isn't only about mourning for the lost object, it's also about struggling against the object's implacable refusal to let go. Yet there's something hollow about Cobb's grief; on its own terms, it doesn't convince as anything other than a genre-required character trait. It seems instead to stand in for something else, another sadness—a loss that the film points to but can't name.

One aspect of this loss concerns the unconscious itself, and here we might take Nolan's choice of terms seriously. For

A HIERARCHY . . .



Inception. © 2010 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc./Legendary Pictures. DVD: Warner Home Video.

. . . OF WORLDS AND DREAMS

Inception. © 2010 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc./Legendary Pictures. DVD: Warner Home Video.

those with a psychoanalytic bent, the script's repeated references to the "subconscious"—as opposed to "unconscious"—no doubt grate, but this might have been a Freudian slip of a particularly revealing kind. The terrain that *Inception* lays out is no longer that of the classical unconscious, that impersonal factory which, Jean-François Lyotard points out in *Libidinal Economy* (Athlone, 1993), psychoanalysis describes "with the help of images of foreign towns or countries such as Rome or Egypt, just like Piranesi's *Prisons* or Escher's *Other Worlds*" (164). *Inception*'s arcades and hotel corridors are on the contrary those of a globalized capital whose reach easily extends into the former depths of what was once the unconscious. There's nothing alien, no *other place* here, only a mass-marketed "subconscious" recirculating deeply familiar images mined from an ersatz psychoanalysis. So in place of the eerie enigmas of the unconscious, we're instead offered an Oedipus-lite scene played out between Fischer and a projection of his dead father. The off-the-shelf, premasticated quality of this encounter is entirely lacking in any of the weird idiosyncrasies which give Freud's case histories their power to haunt. Cod-Freudianism has long been metabolized by an advertising–entertainment culture which is now ubiquitous, as psychoanalysis gives way to a psychotherapeutic self-help that's diffused through mass media. It's possible to read *Inception* as a staging of this superseding of psychoanalysis, with Cobb's apparent victory over the Mal projection, his talking himself around to accepting that she is just a fantasmatic substitute for his dead wife, almost a parody of psychotherapy's blunt pragmatism.

The question of whether Cobb is still dreaming or not at the film's end is ultimately too simple. For there's also the problem of *whose* dream Cobb might be in, if not his "own." The old Freudian paradigm made this a problem too, of course—but there the issue was the fact that the ego was not master in its own house because the subject was constitutively split by the unconscious. In *Inception*, the ego is still not a master of the house, but that's because the forces of predatory business are everywhere. Dreams have ceased to be the spaces where private psychopathologies are worked through and have become the scenes where competing corporate interests play out their banal struggles. *Inception*'s "militarized subconscious" converts the infernal, mythical urgencies of the old unconscious into panicked persecution and a consolatory familialism: pursued at work by videogame gunmen, you later unwind with the kids building sandcastles on a beach. This is another reason that the dreams in *Inception* appear so undreamlike. For, after all, these aren't dreams in any conventional sense. The designed virtual spaces of *Inception*'s quasi-dreams, with their nested levels, evidently resemble a videogame more than they recall dreams as psychoanalysis would understand them. In the era of neuromarketing, we're presided over by what J. G. Ballard called "fictions of every kind," the embedded literature of branding consultancies, advertising agencies, and games manufacturers. All of which makes one of *Inception*'s premises—that it's difficult to implant an idea in someone's mind—strangely quaint. Isn't "inception" what so much late-capitalist cognitive labor is all about?

For inception to work, Arthur and Cobb tell Saito early in the film, the subject must believe that the implanted idea is their own. The self-help dictums of psychotherapy—which Cobb affirms at the end of *Inception*—offer invaluable assistance in this ideological operation. As Eva Illouz argues in *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Polity, 2007), discussing the very conversion of psychoanalysis into self-help that *Inception* dramatizes, today's prevalent ideas of therapy rest on disturbingly masochistic assumptions that conveniently exclude any social explanation of personal distress. The supposedly empowering idea of self-help is paradoxically rather effective at entrenching the theory that the roots of our own unhappiness are inside us: "The narrative of self-help is . . . not only closely intertwined with a narrative of psychic failure and misery, but is actually put into motion by it. The contemporary Freudian legacy is, and ironically so, that we are the full masters in our own house, even when, or perhaps especially when, it is on fire" (47). Yet our misery, like our dreams, our cars, and our refrigerators, is in fact the work of many anonymous hands. This impersonal misery may be what *Inception* is ultimately about. The ostensibly upbeat ending and all the distracting boy-toy action cannot dispel the nonspecific but pervasive pathos that hangs over *Inception*. It's a sadness that arises from the impasses of a culture in which business has closed down not only the strangeness of the unconscious, but also, even more disturbingly, any possibility of an outside—a situation that *Inception* exemplifies, rather than comments on. You yearn for foreign places, but everywhere you go looks like local color for the film set of a commercial; you want to be lost in Escheresque mazes, but you end up in an interminable car chase. In *Inception*, as in late capitalist culture in general, you're always in someone else's dream, which is also the dream of no one.

MARK FISHER is the author of *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero Books, 2010).

DVD DATA *Inception.* Director: Christopher Nolan. © 2010 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. / Legendary Pictures. Publisher: Warner Home Video. $28.98, 1 disc.

ABSTRACT An analysis of Christopher Nolan's science-fiction thriller, *Inception,* which relates it to Nolan's previous films and argues that the film's multilayered nest of worlds and strangely cold action sequences relate to the commodification of the psyche.

KEYWORDS *Inception,* Christopher Nolan, psychoanalysis and cinema, dreams and cinema, therapy and cinema

THE DISLIKE BUTTON

J. M. TYREE REVIEWS THE SOCIAL NETWORK, DAVID FINCHER'S FACEBOOK FILM

Media reports of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg having "fun" watching David Fincher's *The Social Network*, although obviously prepackaged to project good sportsmanship, fit the film's portrayal of his character. Another mogul might weep or get angry—maybe throw something or sue somebody—but Zuckerberg prefers to appear untouchable. He has created a safe miniature universe online in which negativity has been banished along with intimacy, a haven from confrontation and physical contact with other people in which the only available option is to "Like" everyone and everything. In one of the movie's critical scenes, Mark (Jesse Eisenberg) meets Sean Parker (Justin Timberlake), the charismatic founder of Napster, for the first time. The girlfriend (Brenda Song) of his business partner Eduardo Saverin (Andrew Garfield) gauchely requests an Appletini; Sean, acting princely, orders Appletinis all round. It's a precis of what life will later become on Facebook: we'll all have Appletinis and we'll all Like them, then we'll Tag the photo and Friend the vodka company's Fan Page so that the boss can check to see that we had fun.

But what is David Fincher doing here? At first glance, Mark's realm, as depicted in Aaron Sorkin's rapid-fire script as a bleak comedy of collegiate and corporate malfeasance, would not seem to be very inviting territory in terms of genre, and not especially hospitable to the director's macabre compulsions toward fright, violence, and decay. Yet Mark (Eisenberg plays him clinically depressed, with a rare and broken smile) resembles in many odd ways the long list of Fincher sociopaths, protagonists, villains, and antiheroes. "Damaged goods," the director remarks of the character in the film's DVD special features. Fincher's isolated freaks—at least one can be found also in *Se7en* (1995), *The Game* (1997), *Fight Club* (1999), *Panic Room* (2002), *Zodiac* (2007), and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008)—share a shifting set of pathologies. Almost all of them, like Mark, are portrayed as male loners without close family or successful love relationships, many are independently wealthy and incapable of enjoying their money, and more than a few develop ambitious schemes that are obsessive if not deeply antisocial or murderous. Mark follows this pattern but also inverts it. "He never seemed that cruel or despicable to me," Fincher says, emphasizing how Sorkin's fictionalizations tend toward humanizing the character. Yet the character's very incapacity for strong affect of any kind is deeply unsettling, especially since, as Eisenberg suggests in an interview recorded for the making-of feature film included with the DVD release, *How Did They Make a Movie About Facebook?*, Mark is the "personification" of Facebook.

The schemes of Fincher's characters tend towards delusions of grandeur and the establishment of individual conspiracies or even shadow organizations that mimic or undermine American corporate life. It might be said that *Se7en*'s John Doe (Kevin Spacey), like the writer of the coded letters in *Zodiac*, takes self-employment and entrepreneurial public relations to an extreme. Operation Mayhem, run by Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) in *Fight Club*, is a parody of business ultimately dedicated to the annihilation of the credit-card companies. In *The Game*, Conrad Van Orton (Sean Penn) refers his brother Nicholas (Michael Douglas) to a different sort of fight club, Creative Recreation Services, which, like another California industry, specializes in therapeutic spectacles of violence. These productions are alternative structures to what's seen by their creators as an oppressive banality. They're cancers loose in the political unconscious, sham companies, anti-corporations, or one-man sleeper cells containing criminal orchestrations of fun, to be admired in fear, launched by an assortment of psychos. *The Social Network* shifts away from Fincher's genres of choice and lacks his characteristic displays of splashy violence, but it pursues this line of anti-corporate mischief and the director's ongoing dissection of male sociopathology.

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Screenwriter Aaron Sorkin (left) and director David Fincher on set
The Social Network. © 2010 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Releasing.

The film's tone might disguise structural similarities between Mark and another famous Bay Area code writer portrayed in *Zodiac*. Granted that Mark isn't a couple-killer, he does come off as a new type of psycho incapable of intimacy, the public enemy of the idea of friendship in the real, imperfect world. In order to be Fincherized, it's vital that this Mark appear alone, stripped of his real-life romantic partner and treated as defective human merchandise. On his blog post "Communicating in Code," Jim Emerson calls the film "the digital flip-side of *Zodiac*" (blogs.suntimes.com/scanners). The films initially seem like the obverse and reverse of coins minted in the same realm, a quintessential California nightmare and dream, respectively. One glaringly obvious difference is that Mark has learned to adapt in an immensely successful way. A better comparison between Fincher films would involve a hypothetical business meeting between Mark and *The Game*'s Nicholas. They might recognize one another as kindred spirits, but *The Social Network* presents a Nicholas Van Orton who's never cured, who never even recognizes that there's a problem, and who, outside of isolated gestures that lead nowhere, doesn't seem to care a great deal about anything except his business.

The Social Network, like many of Fincher's worlds, is deliberately devoid of female guidance. Fincher is a cultural detective or a forensic pathologist of what his first film, *Alien* 3 (1992), depicts as an outpost for all-male mutants with a "YY Chromosome." Like his many male counterpointed characters, several of whom are detective protagonists of various kinds—William Somerset (Morgan Freeman) in *Se7en*, The Narrator (Edward Norton) in *Fight Club*, and Robert Graysmith (Jake Gyllenhaal) in *Zodiac*—Fincher is attracted to the guys who bomb or shoot or code or nerd their way into the news. "What went wrong here?" Fincher's films ask, but he remains committed to a lack of fixed answers (who was the writer of the Zodiac letters, really?) as well as to a mainstream cinema of extreme pessimism (even *Benjamin Button* has an unhappy ending). Christopher Nolan shares this world of masculine darkness with Fincher and the immense popularity of both directors suggests the unfulfilled thirst for negativity in the culture. Yet while Nolan's yarns spool out in the endless maze of individual trauma—some controlling incident from the past has locked in character and narrative, dissolving time into a Möbius strip—Fincher's tales categorically reject

individual biography as a sufficient cause for the sheer volume of male sociopaths running amok. *Zodiac* is exemplary in this regard because it completely discards the logic of the personal case study of abnormal psychology popularized by *Psycho* (1960) and instead raises the possibility that we'll simply never know why. (Of Fincher's films, *The Game* remains the most focused on the explanatory power of trauma and family drama.)

The Social Network, although fashioned from entirely different generic elements than *Zodiac*, follows a similar pattern of failed explanation. Its narrative structure of flashbacks relates to *Citizen Kane* as a botched profile, perhaps, yet whatever's wrong with Mark has nothing to do with his past or childhood, beyond his hint that Harvard's exclusive clubs offer "a better life." Zadie Smith, in "Generation Why?" (*New York Review of Books*, November 25, 2010), in which she describes teaching at Harvard during the years Zuckerberg founded Facebook, notes that this online Hearst really has no Rosebud. The clear suggestion that Mark has always been "an asshole" (according to his ex-girlfriend Erica Albright, played by Rooney Mara), or someone who is always "trying so hard" to be one (according to one of his lawyers, Marylin Delpy, played by Rashida Jones), forces the viewer to look elsewhere for explanations. There's no moment before the trauma that can be redeemed, mourned, or even remembered. Mark can be found staring off into space, interrupting a legal deposition to inform the lawyers that "it's raining," and making weird throat-clicking sounds during a business meeting with an ad man (played by Sorkin, who also directed the film's final shot and whose ubiquity on the set is evident from the DVD extras). He suppresses a faint smile as he crashes Harvard's computer network and flashes little looks that seem to say, "how odd, this whole human life thing" (Eisenberg, in an astonishingly clipped performance, relies on slight movements of his lips and eyes). Like Nicholas in *The Game*, Mark is another guy who doesn't like to look at people when he's talking to them. "Close proximity" features on Fincher's list of the things that make Mark most uncomfortable, according to snippets of his direction shown in the making-of film. "I was looking at the architecture," he says in yet another depressingly "fun" location, a San Francisco nightclub. If he's often looking at a computer screen instead, that doesn't necessarily mean that computers made him this way.

The received idea that Fincher's film is a slap aimed at a younger generation of digital drones—a challenge from old media delivered to new media—needs further scrutiny, especially when the actions and motives of Mark's elders and mentors are taken into account. The president of his university, Lawrence Summers (Douglas Urbanski), is a jaded prick who loathes the problems of young people; Sean, Mark's pied piper, who encourages him to move his operation to the west coast, is a smarmy loser trying to recapture vanished youth by dating underwear models and snorting coke off the bodies of sorority girls; Peter Thiel (Wallace Langham), the first large-scale angel investor in Facebook, seems to view Eduardo, Mark's "only friend," as a threat to the company's success. In *The Social Network*, almost everyone is an asshole, including Mark's privileged twin rivals at Harvard, Cameron Winklevoss (Armie Hammer) and Tyler Winklevoss (played by Josh Pence with Hammer's face digitally imposed). They are creating "The Harvard Connection," an elite dating site with chum Divya Narendra (Max Minghella), who's even less pleasant than "The Winklevii." Prince Albert (James Shanklin), a European royal at the Henley regatta in England, is only the most refined of the film's superficial jerks. The exceptions to this world of dicks are the two tough and serious women, lawyer Marylin and ex-girlfriend Erica, who assures Mark that "you'll be a very successful computer person" and who wishes him "good luck with your videogame." And of course there's ultra-nice, ultra-generous, ultra-patient, almost saintly Eduardo (played by Garfield as "relentlessly human," according to Fincher's DVD commentary), who gets screwed.

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Fincher's Harvard—the subject of some of the longest shots in the film, during the credits—is a shell game of empty heritage fronts bathed in his signature green toxic light, a place where private clubs dangle a vision of wealth involving dreary or fake ecstasy for the baseball-cap-wearing set. (In fact, it's not Harvard, which shunned the film, it's Johns Hopkins with various Cambridge landmarks inserted, one example of the film's endless but subtle sleight of hand.) Subsequently, Sean convinces Mark to relocate near Stanford, but the fun to be had on the west coast looks similarly specious because the same puerile notions of male entertainment lie behind it. Mark goes from chewing on a green dart in his Harvard dorm room, while creating a "Facemash" program to quantify the hotness of his female classmates, to gesturing with a piece of red licorice at a California living room where real girls are getting stoned from a colossal bong and playing videogames. The Facemash sequence is carefully intercut with the happenings at the exclusive "final club," and it's clear that the fantasy which comes to life later on is the same banal and sexist junk. Though Mark attends neither of the bookended college parties at Harvard and Stanford, he remains trapped in a specific notion of the glamorous young businessman with "groupies" as the pinnacle of twenty-first-century American achievement. (As this word escapes Eduardo's mouth, the score by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross—dominated by "loneliness" with "seething anger, vitriol bubbling underneath it,"

Top row: *Se7en*. © 1995 New Line Productions Inc. DVD: New Line Home Video. Second row, left: *The Game*. © 1997 Polygram Filmed Entertainment Inc. DVD: Universal Studios. Right: *Fight Club*. © 1999 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. DVD: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment. Third row, left: *Zodiac*. © 2007 Warner Bros. Ent./Paramount Pictures Corp. DVD: Paramount Home Entertainment. Others: *The Social Network*. © 2010 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

according to Fincher—marks a chilling turn.) Equally important is the shallowness that rides the back of wealth on both coasts. These locations matter: Mark's company, by definition, requires no particular geographical base, and yet it had to be hatched in Cambridge and somehow wound up headquartered in Silicon Valley. Fincher, directing Eisenberg during the pool scene, explains that Mark is videotaping his friends in the spirit of "let's have a fake moment where we memorialize all the fun that we weren't having."

The film's portrayal of an entirely corporatized world devoid of alternatives to entrepreneurial life, in which the Secretary of the Treasury acts as the President of Harvard and starting a business is the main point of college life, is pointed. (During the three-week rehearsals that predated shooting, in which Fincher, Sorkin, and the principals sat under a quotation from a critic excoriating *Fight Club* for being "anticapitalist" and "anti-society," Fincher opined: "This college experience is not about 'it's all open to you because you got into Harvard'—that was all a lie.") But Mark's apparent lack of greed—"money isn't a big part of my life," he brags during legal proceedings—represents the film's biggest red herring. He uploaded his first software invention for free instead of cashing in, and he wants the first version of his website "The Facebook" to be "clean and simple . . . no Disneyland, no Live Nude Girls." He resists Eduardo's early attempts to monetize the site with ads by saying "we don't even know what this thing is yet." Mark would not be an antihero if he didn't possess an inherent magnetism, and perhaps his most loveable idea is that his business should be considered under the aegis of fashion because "fashion is never finished." All this makes Mark far more intriguing—weirdly charming, distressingly misguided, woefully sad-eyed—than his college business rivals. It also intensifies the pleasure of his "computer person" retorts to his dunderheaded enemies, which have a repetitive, tautological, "Let X=X" flair about them: "If you guys were the inventors of Facebook, you'd have invented Facebook."

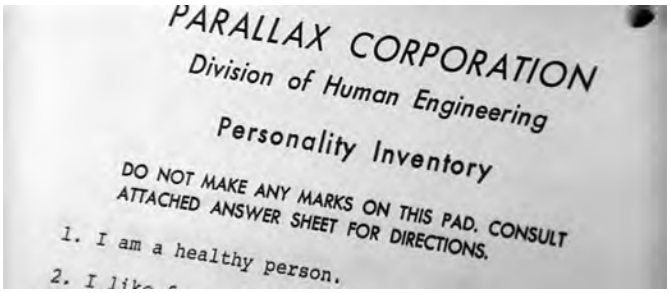
Yet Mark's acquisitiveness takes on a purer form than his own personal enrichment. He's not an alternative to an entrepreneur but rather an entrepreneur par excellence—he's not *even* in it for the money, it's much worse than that. What puts saucers in his eyes isn't a vision of personal wealth but the "cool" concept of "a billion dollars" itself. Similarly, the business plan of Facebook is to remain "cool" (this may be the character's prime directive as well) but this coolness is defined in strict terms of numerical superiority, the sheer volume of Facebook users. After Erica slaps him down in a bar as being the type of guy who tries to control life by issuing "snide bullshit from a dark room," he turns to Eduardo and says, "We need to expand."

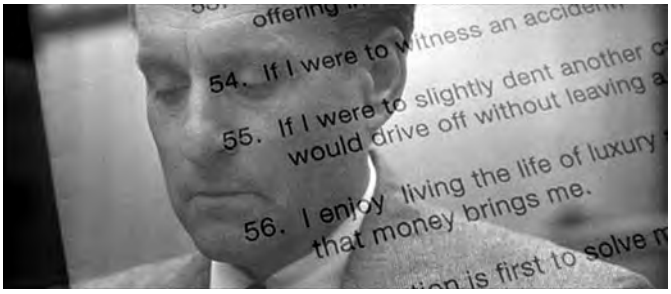
Mark starts off in the film as a college computer hacker, but his enterprise could hardly be called anti-establishment in the typical Hollywood mode. It may have been a similarly grand plan launched from a similarly "dark room," but Facebook represents the opposite of *Fight Club*'s Operation Mayhem. Mark also bears no resemblance to the hacker played by Robert Redford in Sydney Pollack's post-Watergate *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), who meddles with Ma Bell in order to spy on the CIA as a "phone phreak" and riddle out a government conspiracy. *The Social Network* is a film made for a completely different zeitgeist in which the question of rebellion is off the radar. Mark's company spies on its users, trading a social experience for a gold mine of personal data—it's a form of corporate hacking into the private realm rather than vice versa. The mythology of hackers champions their ability to disrupt the fabric of power, but Facebook threatens this utopian vision of the Internet as a clandestine and anonymous free zone and pirate bay of illicitness, copyright infringement, perversion, illegality, haters, trolls, hackers, leakers, and multiple identities. Facebook has been used to mobilize political protests, but its page for the Anonymous group of hackers was quickly torn down after members began launching anti-corporate cyber attacks on the websites of Visa and Mastercard.

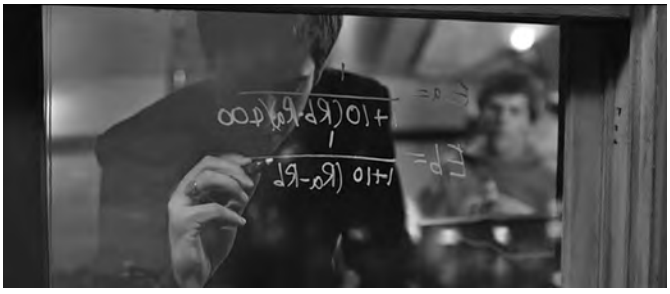
In *The Game*, Fincher drew upon another mid-1970s film about conspiracy, Alan J. Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1974), to suggest how an endless set of feedback questionnaires could lead to a personalized corporate experience that simulates real life. Facebook, according to Sean in *The Social Network*, is designed for a somewhat similar purpose: "the true digitization of real life . . . first we lived on farms, then we lived in cities, and now we're gonna live on the Internet." But this "life" is ultimately something that can be harvested; in one sense it's an interminable marketing survey that you don't even know you're taking. Facebook also could be viewed as a user-generated conspiracy against the irresponsible elements of the self. Zadie Smith's comment that the Facebook experience is "suburban" usefully suggests a hint of white-picket-fence paranoia. One's own social network serves as a tidy online superego in which "they" (friends, friends of friends, work colleagues, family, parents, bosses, advertisers, company employees, etc.) may or may not be watching and one's honesty get diluted as one acquires more and more "friends."

Internet visionary Josh Harris, the subject of the documentary *We Live in Public* (2009), and the first person to install a twenty-four-hour webcam in his house, believed that as people lost their privacy to computerized surveillance technologies they would become more uninhibited and id-driven but also potentially more liable to antisocial behavior.

ENCRYPTION AND EFFACEMENT







Top left: *The Parallax View*. © 1974 Paramount Pictures Corporation. DVD: Paramount Home Entertainment. Top right: *Three Days of the Condor*. © 1975 Dino De Laurentiis Corporation. DVD: Paramount Home Entertainment. Second row, left: *Seconds*. © 1966 Paramount Pictures Corporation. DVD: Paramount Home Entertainment. Right: *You've Got Mail*. © 1998 Warner Bros. DVD: Warner Home Video. Third row, left: *The Game*. © 1997 Polygram Filmed Entertainment Inc. DVD: Universal Studios. Right: *Fight Club*. © 1999 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. DVD: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment. Fourth row, left: *Zodiac*. © 2007 Warner Bros. Ent./Paramount Pictures Corp. DVD: Paramount Home Entertainment. Others: *The Social Network*. © 2010 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

Yet the actual online user experience seems more akin to that of the character played by Rock Hudson in John Frankenheimer's *Seconds* (1966); plastic surgery allows him to get a new face and let his id loose in a libertine frenzy, but he discovers later that he can't shake his real personality or adopt a new persona so blithely after all. Facebook in particular seems to deny the hope of abandoning "the face" as described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987): "if human beings have a destiny, it is rather to escape the face, to dismantle the face and facializations, to become imperceptible, to become clandestine" (171). Instead, Facebook welcomes everyone to become a little bit more like Edvard, the dreaded bishop in *Fanny and Alexander* (1982), who explains: "I have only one mask. But it is branded into my flesh. And if I try to tear it off—"

Facebook is a sort of "No Fighting Club" in which participants must be physically separated and free from touching intimacy in order to interact. Fincher, in *Fight Club*, presents the viewpoint of internalized corporate life leading to psychosis, as in the memorable image of the protagonist's living room filling up with price tags and product names generated out of "the IKEA nesting instinct." One of the problems of Facebook is that it's like that IKEA of the mind, rewarding users who generate an endless flow of good news and consumable tidbits of their own interiority, a stream of faux-consciousness that makes one seem more cheerful, more entrepreneurial, and more boring than anyone that someone would ever want to befriend. At issue is a deficit of mayhem that obviously troubles Fincher as the other side of the problem of corporate psychosis.

Mark's description of his product in the film reveals that it's not an alternative to but rather a simulation of "the entire social experience of college." The film's rendition of that real "experience" leads to questions about its value—is the reality of college really any fun at all? Is life fun, and if so, why would Facebook ever develop into a problem? "This is pathetic," says a girl as she checks out the original Facemash project, but what's actually happening at Harvard doesn't appear any less pathetic. Mark's insight—his original sin or Faustian bargain—was that the images on Facemash had to be real people that would be recognized by their classmates. In a similar fashion, Mark's college blog uses his ex-girlfriend's real name, broadcast for all the world to read. On Facebook, you have to be yourself—your trackable, locatable, responsible self—the self of your "registered identity" offline.

So much for the realm of the web as a nerd's paradise of Dungeons-and-Dragons-style alter egos with elevated charisma points, or a fantasy realm of Second Lives where we can escape from reality and become someone else in a burst of delusional freedom. So much for the Internet as a contemporary version of Walter Benjamin's "Arcades" of surreptitious connections and hidden passages between commercial and red-light districts—or even for the confusion of fictional personas and real-life personalities that allowed the love affair to progress in *You've Got Mail* (1998). Facebook and the Internet are often conflated by critics who wish to read *The Social Network* as a wry or acid commentary on a new generation who've used computers since childhood, but in fact the logic of Facebook is inherently destructive to the utopian conception of the Internet as a nerd's Interzone, since we no longer go online to shed our everyday identity but rather to cultivate the hedges of a miniaturized version of our offline selves. Facebook represents the continuing colonization of the Internet by real life.

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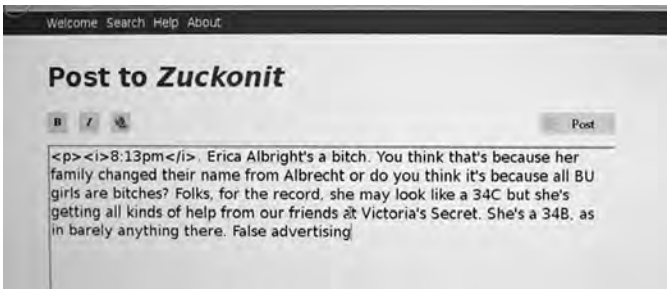
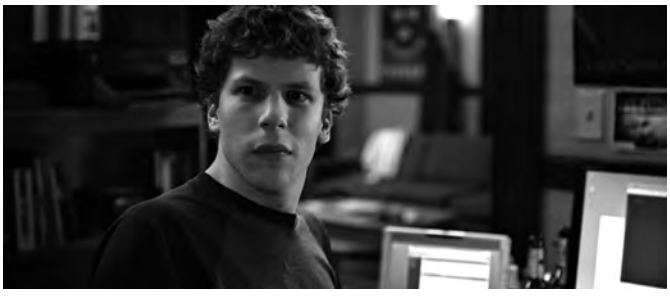
The trailer for *The Social Network*—beginning with a choral version of Radiohead's "Creep" sung over Facebook photo albums—hinted at a post-punk sensibility designed to besmirch what *Fight Club* calls "corporate art." It also misled viewers into thinking that substantial sequences of the film would display life online, something that *The Social Network* avoids apart from the Facemash sequence at Harvard and the culminating moment of Mark's isolation at the end of the film. ("I'm just sitting here," Mark says; then he borrows a laptop in a belated attempt to Friend Erica on his own site. But: "Erica Albright will have to confirm that you are friends.") Fincher's decision to avoid displaying much actual online life may be a move that will help the film endure, since nobody really knows what things will look like on screen in the future or whether Facebook will remain the web's most popular attraction. Perhaps *The Social Network* displays almost nothing of life on Facebook because Fincher doesn't believe any exists, or perhaps it's because Fincher believes online life lacks drama or will wind up looking too dated, like the desktop icons of *You've Got Mail*, with its homage to the signature slogan of AOL, the media conglomerate of its day. Fincher's film, however, does mimic the rapid-fire aesthetic of clicking around the web in brief bursts of focused attention, intercutting narrative sequences seemingly at will, moving back and forth in time, and jumping around in space according to a complex weaving process that subtly resembles the navigation of clips and web pages. *The Social Network*'s uncountable cuts, accelerated pacing, and its sprinkling of moments from scores of takes—most notoriously, the ninety-nine-take opening scene with simultaneously recording A and B cameras—makes its illusion of seamlessness remarkable.

FACE TO FACEBOOK





The Social Network. © 2010 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

The human factor
The Social Network. © 2010 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc.
DVD: Sony Pictures Entertainment

Even though nothing of the trailer's depiction of online life survives in the film, its music feels apropos on several levels. Both Radiohead and Fincher debuted in 1992, and both achieved enormous popularity in the 1990s through a similar brand of cool gloom. On their 1998 mini-album "Airbag/How's My Driving," released a year before Fincher's *Fight Club*, Radiohead included a song entitled "Palo Alto" that hinted why that peculiar "city of the future" where "everyone is happy" would one day become the Headquarters for Facebook as well as a culturally-resonant location in Fincher's film: "I'm OK / How are you? / Thanks for asking, thanks for asking." Such California-style sentiments are more fully explored in Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Bright Sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America* (Metropolitan Books, 2009), which argues that "positivity is not so much our condition or our mood as it is part of our ideology," exploring its political dangers as a cover for American nationalism and "the crueler aspect of the market economy" (8). Like Slavoj Žižek, Fincher explores the American commandment—"Enjoy!"—the capitalist superego's intolerance for negative affect—as a problem, most conspicuously in the hotel ad in *Fight Club*. In that film, the narrator's corporatized existence induces a form of psychosis that also reads as a Deleuzean "schizoanalysis" of that economy, which some part of his brain wants to bomb in a self-destructive descent into terrorism. Mark's big project to change the world results in an anodyne colony in which nobody has enemies. Yet the motives Fincher imputes to Mark and his other antiheroes resemble those of Radiohead's "Creep": "I wanna have control . . . I want you to notice when I'm not around." As posited by the trailer, these lyrics illuminate the user experience of Facebook as well, which helps explain why this comedy has provoked so much unease.

"I don't hate anybody," Mark claims during a legal deposition related to the financial battles, personal betrayals, and ill will that marked the birth of Facebook. It's a strange thing for a Fincher antihero to say. What's ultimately distressing about Mark is that his corporation encourages the repression of negativity. No Dislike Button can exist on Facebook (one that briefly appeared turned out to be a computer virus). It's tempting to read Fincher's film as an audacious hack into Mark's domain, one big Dislike Button, as well as a witty, tables-turning invasion of his privacy. In *The Social Network*, Facebook's founder becomes a new type of malfunctioning male, whose lack of anger represents what Jodi Dean, in her book *Blog Theory* (Polity Press, 2010), calls "a situation of non-desire, non-meaning," a collective "fantasy of a society without antagonism" (8). But, late in the film, a contrasting emphasis on the persistence of anger and even violence returns for a moment. During the climax of *The Social Network*, Eduardo discovers Mark's betrayal and smashes his friend's computer. The act reveals a thwarted desire for intimacy—it's a physical confrontation, a real fight that nevertheless raises the hope of messy human contact. For a moment the corporation's ideal programmer is unnerved, but mostly he remains "wired in," another company term for shutting out the world.

J. M. TYREE is a *Film Quarterly* Writer-at-Large.

DVD DATA *The Social Network*. Director: David Fincher. © 2010 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. Publisher: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. $28.96, 2 discs.

ABSTRACT A study of David Fincher's film about the founding of Facebook, *The Social Network*, in terms of its continuity with the director's previous work; its depiction of U.S. institutions; and its complex, disturbing account of the cultural consequences of the Internet.

KEYWORDS *The Social Network*, David Fincher, Facebook, masculinity, Internet

THE ALGORITHMIC SPECTATOR

***The Social Network* (David Fincher)**
***Catfish* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman)**

In the terminology of computer programming, "platform" denotes the physical hardware or system framework that supports software applications. In an extended sense, movie theaters, DVD players, and operating systems (such as Mac OSX or Windows) are all platforms. With the release of two Facebook-related films—a new kind of user-generated content—they all in one way or another host the online social-networking service launched by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. David Fincher's *The Social Network* is an industrial melodrama about the site's launch, while Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman's *Catfish* uses ethnographic documentary to address vexing questions about how the site—and the changing meanings of "platform," "application," "user," and "database"—influence our experiences of identity and desire.

Because there are numerous ways to use Facebook, the site exemplifies the ambiguous role platforms play in our understanding of new media. For many, the site is principally a database of personal information, an ever-expanding archive of profiles, status updates, wall posts, and photos. (Some even refer to its social utility as a verb—"Facebook me.") Since 2007 Facebook has itself also been a platform, allowing developers to create and integrate applications (such as games or quizzes) for the site. These applications enhance the paths one can follow through Facebook, the personal algorithms that guide one's approach to all the experiences on offer: activists groups can organize around a common cause; corporations can pursue potential customers through targeted advertising; and individual users can message, chat, or even "poke" friends they invite into their networks.

Because Facebook supports so many different algorithms, it challenges the previous cultural dominance of narrative storytelling. As Lev Manovich argues in his pioneering book, *The Language of New Media* (MIT Press, 2001), "database and narrative are natural enemies" (225). Whereas narratives arrange characters and events selectively and sequentially, Facebook offers no fixed organization of all the material it stores; it is a boundless online sprawl with none of the predetermined orderliness of narrative. Although *Catfish* and *The Social Network* demonstrate that Facebook can nevertheless be used to generate narrative, both films struggle with the reality that it need not—that as a database and a platform it also offers its users what Manovich calls "a new way to structure our experience of ourselves and of the world" (219), a way that does not depend on linear, hierarchical storytelling. These films strongly suggest that our experiences of the world depend on the multiple technological interfaces that mediate it for us and prompt speculation about a new kind of spectator—an algorithmic spectator, who registers narrative as only one mode of connection among many and who forges other associative links as easily as she multitasks between applications on her desktop.

So how do you tell a story about this online world where storytelling itself is withering away? One solution is to run Facebook through preexisting genres, as Aaron Sorkin did while drafting *The Social Network*. Speaking to Jose Antonio Vargas in *The New Yorker* (September 20, 2010), Sorkin cites Shakespeare's *Richard III* as the model for his "classic story of friendship, loyalty, betrayal, and jealousy": Facebook as new-media tragedy in five acts. *The Social Network* also draws heavily from *Citizen Kane*, particularly its flashbacks, which Fincher and Sorkin frame with legal depositions instead of interviews. This time, however, there is no Rosebud—or at least no mystery about the lost object. *The Social Network* begins with Mark Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg) getting dumped by Erica Albright (Rooney Mara) for being not a nerd but an asshole. Even as Erica's rejection emblematizes Mark's larger social exclusion from Harvard's elite network of "final clubs," this prologue also teaches its viewer that *The Social Network* is not just about Mark Zuckerberg. Mark may be an asshole but his character is not all that interesting; what is interesting is the alienation that drives his programming. Mark certainly tries very hard to dominate all social, professional, and academic worlds around him—Eisenberg's reticent and controlled performance conveys the sense of a mind always strategizing—but his character remains enigmatic because *The Social Network* takes for granted that Mark's inner life is inaccessible. It focuses instead on desire and competition, on who wants what from whom. In this regard, the film is actually quite different from *Richard III* and *Citizen Kane*, both of which revolve around the inner life of a central protagonist. Personal psychology is left behind in this study of verbal and otherwise mediated exchanges about Mark's code,

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Interfaces

The Social Network. © 2010 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. DVD: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

money, and notoriety. Fittingly, the film's final revelation is not a feeling, but a function: Mark at his laptop, endlessly refreshing its browser to see whether Erica has accepted his friend request.

Facebook can also produce narrative when run as a hoax to distribute misinformation. This occurs, maybe on multiple levels, in Joost and Schulman's *Catfish*. Fair warning: many bloggers have suggested that the first rule of *Catfish* is that you do not talk about *Catfish*, so these spoilers may ruin—or enhance!—the film's mystique. The particular form of their warning is worth noting, however, because its trite allusion to Fincher's famous *Fight Club* belies the relative paucity of comparisons between *Catfish* and *The Social Network*. Although *Catfish* came out two weeks before *The Social Network*—at the height of the latter's advertising blitz—many critics read "the other Facebook movie" alongside *I'm Still Here*, a controversial documentary about Joaquin Phoenix's attempt to break into hip-hop.

Within a week of its release, director Casey Affleck revealed *I'm Still Here* to be "performance art" aimed at exposing the machinations of modern celebrity culture. News of the hoax broke the day before *Catfish*'s commercial launch and reinvigorated earlier speculation that Joost and Schulman had orchestrated some of the relationships they filmed; indeed, the film caught press at its 2010 Sundance premier largely because of public accusations that the directors had manipulated their subjects to produce a more dramatic story. In that story, a twentysomething photographer, Nev Schulman, "friends" a young girl named Abby after she paints one of his published photographs. Nev soon becomes involved with Abby's network of friends and relatives on Facebook, including her exceptionally attractive sister, Megan. He perceives

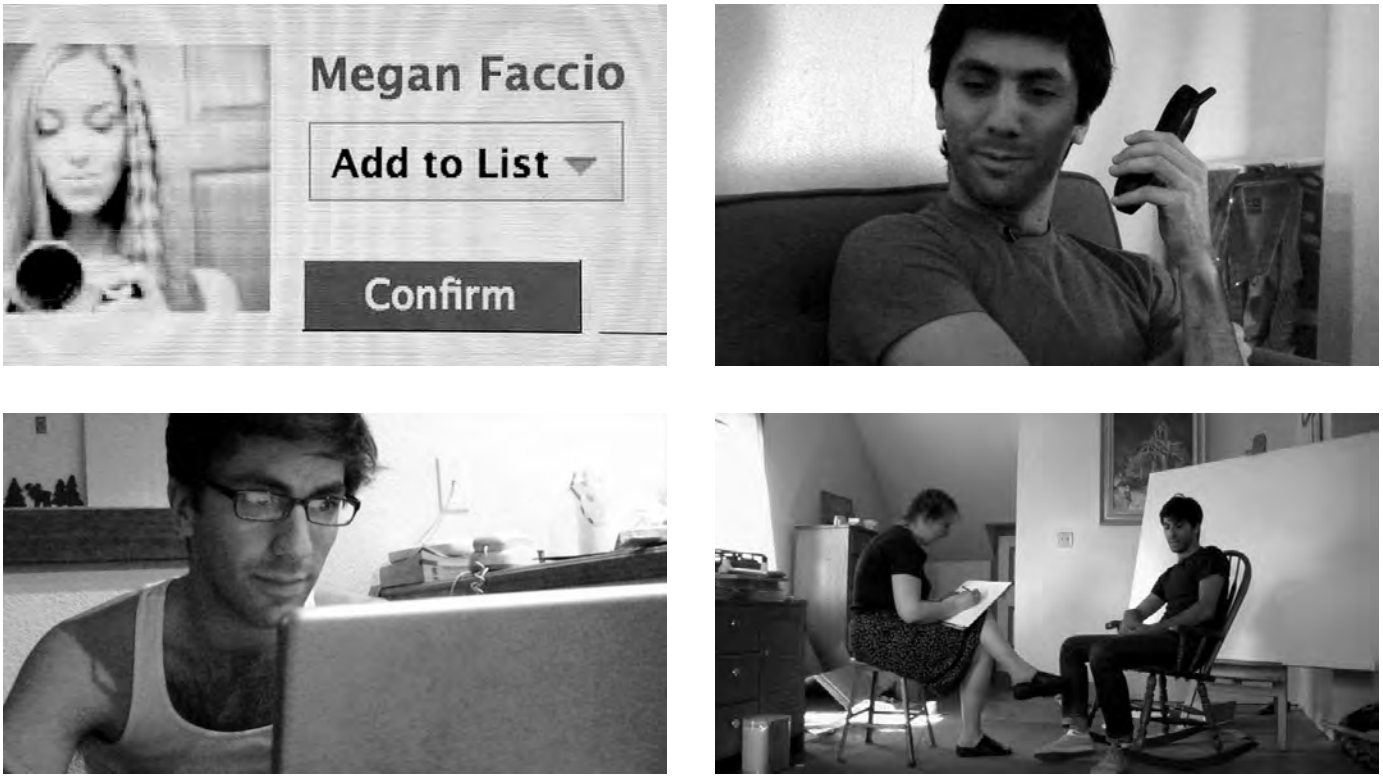
Database montage

Catfish. © 2010 Catfish Picture Company LLC. DVD: Universal Studios.

himself to be falling in love with Megan and travels—with his documentarians—to Michigan's upper peninsula to surprise her at home. While en route, they discover that Megan plagiarized musical performances she posted as her own, and once in Michigan, they learn that her entire identity has been plagiarized: her name stolen from one woman and her face from another while her personality was fabricated by Abby's mother, Angela.

"On the internet, no one knows you're a dog," or so the saying goes, but *Catfish*'s filmmakers do portray Angela as a dog, both the archetypal trickster of Peter Steiner's famous *New Yorker* cartoon (July 5, 1993) and, in the pejorative sense, a woman too middle-aged and provincial to deserve the interest she aroused in Nev. This tension comes crackling to the surface during the film's most excruciating scene, when Nev concludes his confrontation with Angela by asking her to speak in the voice he knows as Megan and explain why she deceived him. Many critics excoriated Joost and Schulman for including this allegedly exploitative stunt, but the scene actually contains a quite palpable—and important—erotic frisson. Nev and Megan still have chemistry, but now Angela's body mediates that attraction; it becomes the necessary yet inconvenient platform for their connection, just as Facebook and cellphones once were.

For that reason, the scene epitomizes the genius of *Catfish* and filmmakers whose worldview recognizes no categorical difference between physical and digital interactions. During the first half of the film—before Nev's discovery—a large percentage of screen time is occupied by images and videos recorded from digital archives: highly pixilated close-ups of Facebook icons, YouTube clips of Abby painting, instant and text messages with relevant passages highlighted, and even establishing shots ripped from Google Earth and Google Street View. The filmmakers openly acknowledge that they did not document Nev and Abby's relationship during its initial phases, so these shots stand in for moments when Joost and Schulman were not yet aware they should be filming. Their use of montage is innovative, because it offers a new algorithm for negotiating between database and narrative. Traditional Hollywood montages string together similar short scenes to speed time's passing (and often a relationship's maturation), and while *Catfish*'s early montages do communicate Nev and Megan's evolving intimacy, they undercut that inevitability by presenting these multimedia clips as samples from the online digital database. The filmmakers also choose a soundtrack—the Langley Schools Music Project's choral cover of "Good Vibrations"—that adds an uncanny, arbitrary air to their samples. This use of montage turns the spectator into a Facebook user in order to facilitate



Intimacy at a distance
Catfish. © 2010 Catfish Picture Company LLC. DVD: Universal Studios.

her identification with Nev as a (betrayed) user during subsequent footage. This kind of filmmaking demands a new kind of algorithmic spectator, one accustomed to fragmented exchanges and for whom narrative is only one form of connection.

The algorithmic spectator is prepared, welcomed, and even produced by the marketing for these films. On *Catfish*'s movie website (www.iamrogue.com/catfish), a grotesquely oversized cursor (similar to the one that moves through the film) pushes the viewer to enter "Nev's World," a simulated desktop on which various applications are running, including Twitter and iChat. As "Nev," one can open email, browse through "my photos," and "participate" in a sexually provocative exchange with Megan. Trailers and a featurette for *Catfish* are also available, but the real pitch of the site is the anticipation of a virtual connection, the tantalizing blend of separation and intimacy that drives Nev's interest in Megan. This desire is predicated on distance—its object, being virtual, must always be out of reach—and *The Social Network* taps into a similar paradoxical appeal in its official trailer. The first fifty seconds offer a deluge of profile pictures, status updates, and other screenshots from Facebook as the Scala and Kolacny Brothers choir sing Radiohead's "Creep." Ninety predictable seconds of catchphrases and sexy shots from the film itself follow before the title card emerges and the singers conclude, "I don't belong here." This moment returns the trailer to the isolation its initial sequence evokes, a dynamic performance of Facebook's bedrock of isolation. Both advertisements thus balance the conventions of feature-film marketing with the appeal of social networks. One might even say they try to run two operating systems at once as they reinterpret the lures of commercial movie culture—sex and intrigue—through a common impetus for social networking: the fear of exclusion, of a life unworthy of narrative.

Both *Catfish* and *The Social Network* struggle with finding narrative forms to incorporate the diffuseness of Facebook, and both realize their most significant insights while working through the paradoxical desires for distance and disclosure this platform produces. Their solutions require their spectator to acknowledge changes in herself. New platforms foster new forms of attention, new algorithms to navigate our relationships with each other and the characters we encounter online and on screen. As any Facebook user will tell you, new platforms alter how we can desire, communicate, and perform ourselves: differently, unevenly, but in dialogue with our machines.

CAETLIN BENSON-ALLOTT teaches film theory and history at Georgetown University.

OF GODS AND HUMANITARIANS

***Of Gods and Men* (Xavier Beauvois)**

Midway through Xavier Beauvois's film about the French Cistercians from the Tibhirine monastery in Algeria who were kidnapped and executed by Islamist terrorists in 1996, two of the monks, driving through the plains below the Atlas mountains, slow down at an army roadblock. As they are waved through we notice a dead terrorist on the side of the road, army officers searching the body impassively. As the car drives on, the camera pans 180 degrees to settle on the face of one of the monks, Frère Christophe, sitting in the passenger seat and looking back at the corpse. We realize retrospectively that the camera's gaze had taken Christophe's perspective, and are now presented with his response to the scene. The shift in focalization, from the corpse and roadblock to the monk's face, is emblematic of the film as a whole. *Of Gods and Men* is set during a particular historical event, the Algerian civil war, whose political currents—the relation between Islam and Islamism, the legacy of decolonization—are of enormous relevance today; but in Beauvois's film they become just a backdrop for a study of the monks' Christian faith. The politics of this emphasis demand closer scrutiny.

The film charts the life of the eight monks living at Tibhirine from the moment that Islamism becomes a force within Algeria until their eventual, inevitable abduction and murder. At first they live something of an idyll of interfaith understanding with the local community: they attend village celebrations and sell honey at the market; Frère Luc, by training a doctor, runs an informal surgery. Villagers start to speak about terrorist attacks on civilians and soon we see a group of Croat builders violently murdered. The monks become increasingly aware that staying will leave them defenceless to attack. They debate among themselves how best to respond to their predicament, at first arguing vehemently (and even calling into question the authority of Frère Christian, abbot of the monastery); eventually, they attain consensus and experience a deep solidarity. Their choice to continue their "mission" confronts them with the exigencies of serving God, with Christophe in particular undergoing a crisis of faith as he finds the situation increasingly impossible to bear. At the same time, the monks become ever more entangled in the conflict raging around them, not least because of Luc's insistence that as a doctor he will treat all-comers, including (much to the irritation of the government authorities) wounded Islamists. But their fate is only a matter of time, and Islamists storm the monastery, abducting all but two of them. At the end, they are marched through the snow-covered Atlas mountains to their place of death.

Beauvois's subject matter is topical. *Of Gods and Men*'s release in France coincided with a spate of kidnappings of French aid workers in Niger and Mali, and this relevance must partly explain its domestic box-office success (more than three million tickets sold in its first two months of release). The near-unanimous critical acclaim has been highly receptive to the conception of France it propagates. The current affairs weekly *L'Express* hailed the film's celebration of "spiritualité, engagement, courage, liberté de choix, tolérance, égalité, fraternité" (October 13, 2010), invoking the founding ideals of French republicanism. *Of Gods and Men* has struck a chord and there is no doubt that it resonates with contemporary debates and anxieties about dialogue between religions, Islamism, and relations with France's former colonies. The first we hear of the terrorists in the film is the story of a young woman murdered for not wearing a hijab. This echoes one of the main arguments in favor of the law (ratified in September 2010) banning the burqa from being worn in public. In a later scene, soldiers demand to see the identity papers of villagers queuing for Luc's clinic. It is hard not to think of Nicolas Sarkozy's controversial policy of deporting illegal immigrants (*sans-papiers*). Such allusions give the film much of its contemporary resonance, yet one also senses that its focus is troublingly Franco-centric in its depiction of the Algerian conflict. Christophe's anguish as he looks at the terrorist's corpse is exemplary of the problem. The experience of victimhood is transferred from the dead terrorist to the monk witnessing the dead body. Moreover, as the camera pans away from the dead body to settle on Christophe's face, the film as a whole turns away from an event in a political struggle with determinate roots in the history of French colonialism to focus instead on an individual's crisis of faith. The politically charged context of a civil war thus gives way to a more rarefied question: how can an infinitely benign God admit such suffering?

The monks formulate their decision to remain in Tibhirine in humanitarian terms. They are portrayed as half martyr, half aid worker, inspired by ideas of Christian sacrifice. "The terrorists cannot kill me: when I became a monk

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Complicity?
Of Gods and Men. © Why Not Productions. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics.

I gave my life to God" is a continual refrain with which Christian reminds himself and his brethren of their duty as monks, and (in the soliloquy that serves as voiceover to the film's epilogue) explains the logic of Christian sacrifice to a secular audience. It is a rather narrow account of Christianity and can be contrasted with, for example, Pasolini's film of *The Gospel According to Matthew* (1964) and its focus on the verses: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Matthew 10: 34–5). Motivating Pasolini is the contradiction between a love for humanity and a love for God. Beauvois's monks encounter no such contradiction—indeed quite the opposite, Christian suggesting that his ordeal at Tibhirine taught him the meaning of "incarnation": "to let Jesus' love enter into our humanity." Indeed, it is this divine love that establishes an interfaith bond, in a compelling early scene, between Christian and a terrorist commander Ali Fayattia. Insurgents invade the monastery, but are repelled by Christian, who tells them: "this is a place of peace." He then quotes the Qur'an in French: "those nearest in love to the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians.'" Fayattia interrupts and continues the quotation in Arabic. Then, in a striking reversal, Christian refers to Jesus Christ by his Arabic name, *Sidna Aïssa*, and Fayattia translates: *Jésu*.

It later transpires that this moment of accord has delayed the monks' abduction: Fayattia, by a kind of unspoken agreement, acts as their protector. It is only after he is killed by government forces that the monks are captured. Thus theology is presented as a form of dialogue that transcends political and cultural divisions, an alternative to violence. The idea of the monks' peaceful beliefs being different from, and morally superior to, the brutality of worldly affairs is unmistakable in the powerful late scene when a military helicopter circles the monastery. From within the building, the monks begin to chant with calm defiance, so as to drown out the noise of the helicopter blade, the pointed contrast between their harmonious plainsong and the brute mechanical drone outside amounting to a struggle between sacred and profane. This scene, with its laconic menace, foreshadows the kidnapping moments later: the Algerian army and the terrorists are at this juncture collapsed by the film into one indeterminate evil.

The scene begins with a shot taken from the point of view of the helicopter gunner. Below him is a scene of pastoral beauty and throughout *Of Gods and Men*, pastoral imagery is opposed to the brutality of politics and armed struggle. The scene that I have already described, in which Christophe sees the corpse, is framed by long panoramic shots of a plain under stormy skies, again observed by the monk. The painterliness of this landscape imagery contrasts, here and elsewhere, with jerky handheld cinematography used to show scenes of violence. These landscape shots highlight the foreignness of the land the monks inhabit—but it is an otherness that can be overcome (or so the film suggests) in the process of tranquil contemplation. At one point Christian walks through the countryside to meditate on the monks' dilemma. He communes with nature—stroking the bark of a tree, walking among a flock of sheep ("a shepherd does not leave his flock when the wolf comes," one of his brethren had

said a little earlier), sitting on the bank of a lake as migrating geese pass overhead. For the first time in the film we hear chanting employed as background music, with no onscreen source, melding with the sounds of nature. A synaesthetic harmony prevails in this scene, suggesting again that the monks belong here. The same notion emerges in the monks' homiletic dialogues. One man argues against leaving the monastery because "the flowers of the meadow do not move to find the sun's rays": according to him, these *déraciné* expatriates have been transplanted, gaining new roots in the earth of their adopted country. To be sure, another tells the villagers: "we're like birds on a branch—we don't know if we'll stay or leave"; but the response he receives reverses the implication of the simile completely: "No, we're the birds, you are the branch; if you go we won't know where to settle." The villager's continuation of the analogy implies that it is only the (French, Christian) monks' presence that allows the (Algerian, Muslim) villagers to be at home in their own country.

This amounts to little less than an apologia for continued French presence in its former colonies: if the terrorists' aim is to expel these foreigners, the simple, peace-loving villagers appeal to their erstwhile colonizers' sense of paternalist duty so that they remain. Beauvois has managed to make a film about postcolonial Algeria in which it is French expatriates who are the victims; the 100,000-plus casualties of the civil war are, for the film's purposes, incidental to the monks' own suffering. Indeed, for all the film's topical allusions, it studiously avoids any overt historical reflection, and in one instance only is the colonial past explicitly invoked. A government official, who has called the monks to his office in order to communicate to them a cable from the French government requesting that they return home, brands French rule an "organized robbery which has slowed down our development." This comment passes without response from the monks, although we know from an earlier scene that they consider this government "corrupt." There are two implications here: firstly, that complaints about the legacy of colonialism are simply an attempt by the government to absolve itself of responsibility for its own failings; secondly, that seeing as the government cannot be trusted to govern properly, it is the monks' humanitarian duty to stay in the ex-colony.

"Corruption" becomes the term the monks use to dismiss the government's legitimacy. And yet the phenomenon invoked is far more complex and ambivalent than the monks would admit, as can be seen in another French film released in 2010, Claire Denis's *White Material*. It is a striking coincidence that two such serious and challenging films should have in close succession chosen for their topic French expatriates in a former colony in Africa. Denis's protagonists, Maria Vial and her family, are coffee farmers in an unnamed West African state (it was shot in Cameroon), who, despite French officials' warnings, refuse to leave as the ex-colony descends into civil war, ultimately with grave consequences for themselves. Again, a roadblock scene is key. Early in the film, Maria is on a bus transporting people to a refugee camp when soldiers arrive and demand to see their papers. One accosts Maria: "There used to be a rebel roadblock here; did you pay them?" Once, she replies: a hundred dollars. "I had to get through," she says. "Everyone pays." The soldier's response is remarkable: "That's what breeds corruption. It's because of people like you that this country is rotten." Much later in the film, we see the roadblock episode Maria refers to in the opening. She is threatened at gunpoint by the rebels, yet the effect is not to make the soldier's charge seem false. Rather, "people like you" would mean those people whose very existence within a political and economic system allows corruption to function. Whereas *Of Gods and Men* presents the monks' dilemma as an ethical one, separate from politics, *White Material* does not elide the political question. Maria has done nothing wrong ethically—and yet she is to blame for corruption by virtue of inhabiting a particular role within a system that deploys corruption as one tool by which to preserve and perpetuate itself.

Of Gods and Men, however, never broaches the possibility that, despite their good intentions, the monks' presence might be complicit in injustice and violence, that they are heirs to the first missionary colonists. In place of political engagement, the film offers a pious, paternalistic humanitarianism. Near the beginning of the film, a young girl is treated by Luc. Before she leaves, her mother points to their shoes which are falling apart . . . and they leave the monastery with a new pair each. Such acts of generosity and charity, presented in understated fashion, are initially very moving, but what they present us with is a relation of dependency and handouts—which may be partly what the "corrupt" official means by the French occupation having "slowed down our development"? Luc's well-meaning gesture obscures historical complexity and economic iniquity, but ultimately the complexity and iniquity remain, more intractable than ever. In hindsight, even its emotional effect is suspect, as though the film had confused its own pathos for a genuine resolution. Indeed *Of Gods and Men* becomes a surprisingly feel-good film, at least for its audience of citizens of a European power whose invidious colonial past is thus suppressed under a cosy, but ultimately false, humanitarian warmth.

DAVID NOWELL-SMITH is Maître de langue in English, Université Paris Diderot.

PARK CITY REMIX

When the Sundance Film Festival debuted in the 1980s, it entered a landscape dominated by a small corps of well-established A-list film festivals: New York, Chicago, San Francisco. A scrappy upstart, it quickly crashed the VIP room with the help of Robert Redford's celebrity. Today that history is barely remembered, erased by three decades of steadily escalating success. The deals, celebrity parties, and high-stakes negotiation may grab headlines in the mainstream media (whose reporters now attend) but they have never truly been central to a festival committed to its carefully curated and juried core: the U.S. and international competitions in drama and documentary.

Ironically, however, the festival's gains have in recent years been accompanied by accelerating criticisms: never has a film festival been such a victim of its own success. Ever since Peter Biskind's 2004 screed, *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance, and the Rise of Independent Film* (Bloomsbury), Sundance has been a punching bag for anyone with a grievance over the direction of "indie" film. Measured against the yardstick of an idealized or even fantasy version of the 1980s, the era when I myself first made the pilgrimage, Sundance today tends to come up short.

2011 may be the year that ends the jinx. New festival director John Cooper (in his second year at the helm) and his team have managed to downplay the festival's celebrity factor and decrease its dependence on Hollywood launches, while boosting quality and racking up one of the strongest years in terms of sales: at this writing, thirty-five films have been picked up for distribution (according to websites *Indiewire* and *Thompson on Hollywood*). Perhaps it was the scant snowfall in Utah, or the New York blizzard that stranded film execs, or the American recession's supposed fading, but there was a measured optimism pervading the back-to-basics mood of the festival (January 20–30). With the new-media Frontiers section relocated to its own "campus" of three buildings and a food truck, and with a new section, Next, to highlight ultra-low-budget films, Sundance 2011 augured a change—the possibility of a new era in which a more level playing field could operate, even perhaps a meritocracy at an altitude and site rarely associated with such a value.

Sundance is not a cinephile's festival, substituting its own versions of American pragmatism, heterodoxy, and DIY moxie. Writers looking for unifying themes that just might reflect the U.S. zeitgeist settled this year on religion and spirituality. I didn't find themes, but I certainly found tendencies: documentaries filled with social commitment and advocacy; lesbian filmmakers and characters that are lively and surprising; a fresh new run at science fiction grounded in the quotidian of today's society; and Latin American cinema (long a Sundance staple) rededicated to characters as a microcosm of society.

An explosion of lesbian filmmaking by a new generation of young filmmakers was absurdly surprising to everyone, coming after weeks of Oscar buzz around *The Kids Are All Right*. These films couldn't be more different from it or each other.

Two screened in the dramatic competition category. *Pariah* is the feature debut by writer–director Dee Rees, a onetime Spike Lee acolyte who got him to sign on as executive director. Hers ain't the Fort Green that Spike knows. Alike (played exquisitely by Adepero Oduye) is a butch high-school girl struggling to get some action, find a girlfriend, and avoid her churchgoing mother's wrath, her detective dad's disappointment, and her kid sister's snitching. The tone is tragicomic, the genre is coming-of-age, and the execution is impeccable.

At first, Rees seems out to let the audience in on the nuts and bolts of today's lesbian adolescent: a set of clothes packed to change into at school, a strap-on provided by her butch buddy, and the eternal search for the right club. When Alike finds love, sex, and rejection all at once, *Pariah* turns explosive. There's a loopy, loping quality to its editing and line deliveries that captures perfectly the know-it-all innocence of the teenager, just as the alt-rock soundtrack offers a pleasant change from the usual hip-hop rhythms. *Pariah* may start with the same letter as *Precious* and may detail the life of an alienated African American young woman, but they are opposite works with opposite sensibilities and aesthetics. While some at Sundance made the terribly facile comparison, *Pariah* is a film about coming into agency, not about abjection. Rees allows her audience to discover how New York's mean streets seem when it's a young butch out for the night instead of the usual guys. Never mind Tyler Perry or Spike Lee: I think Rees has got Scorsese in her blood. And with Focus Features now signed up as distributor, *Pariah* will actually make it to the streets.

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New lesbian features

Left: *Pariah*. Courtesy of Sundance Film Festival. Right: frame from online trailer for *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same*.

Circumstance, the second lesbian feature competing for the drama prize, takes place very far from Brooklyn. Maryam Keshavarz, its Iranian American writer–director, sets her story of forbidden love between women in modern Tehran where a thriving underground club scene puts a young generation on a collision course with the morality police. Keshavarz's inspired decision is to situate these social conflicts within one family: liberal parents who long ago had opposed the shah, the daughter Atafeh with a thirst for experience, and her brother Mehran, a born-again fundamentalist. Atafeh's love for her best friend Shireen plays out in a world of their own making, where friends bond over taboos and how to break them, but the insulation afforded by this private realm proves to be cruelly illusory.

In one hilarious scene, the friends join in a pirate operation dubbing copies of *Milk* and *Sex and the City* into Persian. Delivering Harvey Milk's stirring speeches against intolerance alongside Samantha's orgasmic screams, they express their desire to belong somewhere else. With an eye for detail and atmosphere reminiscent of Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta, Keshavarz nimbly reworks the diaspora narrative with a fresh, stylish, sexy style, as if Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* had been transformed into a close-to-the-heart story even a toon didn't dare to tell. *Circumstance* starts light, then slowly tightens its noose: Dubai is the promised land, but a chilling doom awaits Atafeh and Shireen as they try to reach it.

Both *Pariah* and *Circumstance* track exceptional young women in terrible circumstances. But in a galaxy far far away, and outside the competition—at a midnight screening, to be precise—things were different. Dispensing with realism, melodrama, and suffering, writer–director Madeline Olnek's *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* makes a return to cheesy, 1950s-era science fiction: black-and-white footage, *Twilight Zone* sound effects, and all. Its central characters are three lesbian extraterrestrials from the planet Zots, sent to earth to get their hearts broken and save their planet. (Don't ask.) Like their close cousins, the old *Saturday Night Live* Coneheads, these three voyagers benefit from the curious fact that, despite an otherworldly appearance, nobody actually notices that they're aliens. Olnek gets to mock hilariously the foibles of lesbian dating and romance while adding her own interplanetary twists: aphrodisiac cheesecake, anyone? Alien Zoinx hooks up with Jane, a sad-sack everywoman who works in a stationary shop and dreams of true love. Romance blooms. Despite an aesthetic borrowed from Mike Kuchar and other tropes lifted from *Men in Black*, Olnek's pointed jokes and sweetheart ending mark *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* as a modern-day lesbian fairy tale.

Science fiction isn't just for jokes. Two other intriguing features, *Another Earth* by Mike Cahill (picked up quickly by Fox Searchlight) and Scottish director David Mackenzie's *Perfect Sense*, play with the best kind of futurism: just like today, except for one crucial difference. In *Another Earth*, it's a global similarity: another planet which, as it draws closer, seems to be exactly like ours, triggering excitement, then unease, panic, and euphoria, all believably rendered with great economy. Cahill quietly builds tension, exposing the twisted history and emotional damage of his central couple: a middle-aged composer and grieving widower, and a young woman and ex-con who comes to clean his house. In *Perfect Sense*, the difference takes the form of a mysterious epidemic which robs its victims of their sense of smell, at first, then more. Mackenzie creates a world that spirals so very out of control that even a chef and an epidemiologist (the central couple) can't save it. Both films pivot on a love affair, so the futurism goes down easy. Even so, *Another Earth* won the prestigious Alfred P. Sloan Award for the best film in the festival on a scientific theme.

I'd been looking forward to Miranda July's new film, *The Future*, for ages, and was a huge fan of *Me and You and Everyone We Know* five years ago. Her writing is genius, she

has a way with a web page, and, well, what could go wrong. A lot, as it turns out; but it's a matter of taste, for the new film already has its champions. *The Future* features Paw-Paw the talking cat, July herself as Sophie, and Hamish Linklater as her boyfriend Jason. This dead-end couple becomes galvanized in all the wrong ways by the prospect of adopting the cat. Everything unravels, Sophie quits being a children's dance teacher to go philandering, Jason goes door to door to save the rain forest, and Paw-Paw languishes. Despite the brilliant July touches—a child buried up to her neck in dirt, a lonely old man who seeks company via classified ads, a dad who seems more like a porn star—the tone became too winsome, the narrative too forced, the performances too twee. This is the kind of thing I most dread at film festivals: a confrontation between expectation and reception. Does the deficiency rest with the critic or the film? I'd like to think the latter, but others will disagree.

My favorite dramatic film came from Chile: Pedro Peirano and Sebastian Silva's *Old Cats* (*Gatos Viejos*). A deceptively simple drama, it follows one day in the life of an aged couple, their two cats, and their cluttered apartment. In timeworn cinematic style, their peace is shattered by the unwelcome arrival of their disruptive daughter and her butch lover. A ne'er-do-well and addict, the daughter is bent on stealing the apartment out from under them. While Isadora, the mother, struggles to hide her encroaching dementia, her companion Enrique uses his wits to counter the threat. Then, of course, everything goes awry. A staircase, an elevator, a park all play key roles in the unfolding of the tale. Isadora is played by legendary Chilean actress Bélgica Castro, age ninety; Enrique by renowned actor Alejandro Sieveking; the scheming daughter and her sympathetic sidekick by the same actresses who played the lady and servant in Silva's *The Maid*. A masterful cast, patient camera, narrative immediacy, and tremendous compassion all combine to make *Old Cats* an utter jewel of a drama. I haven't been able to get it out of my mind.

Sundance for a while threatened to be defined by the celebrity gifts known as "swag" so it was a relief this year to see the goods replaced by the real thing: excitement, discovery, and good news for filmmakers. The biggest development was an unprecedented boost for documentary, provided by three new initiatives. Oprah Winfrey was first out of the box. It was announced at a special reception (attended by Rosie O'Donnell, Gloria Steinem, and a raft of admirers) that her OWN network will be prioritizing documentaries. The declaration spread like wildfire: Oprah wants to do for documentaries what she has done for books. At a less public event, the Ford Foundation's Orlando Bagwell announced a $50 million, five-year fund for social-change documentary. That news, too, rocketed around town. And then the *Economist* announced a partnership with PBS Newshour: The Economist Film Project, a showcase for international documentaries on the magazine's themes (though cut into brief extracts, presumably to satisfy American viewers' short attention spans). The giddiness over the good news was bolstered by a terrific crop of documentaries on offer.

Angela Davis
The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975.
Photo: Story. Courtesy of Sundance Film Festival.

The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975 is the documentary that had everyone adrenalized. Swedish director Göran Hugo Olsson got access to a treasure trove of 16mm reports on the Black Power movement shot by Swedish TV journalists. Forgotten in an archive for over thirty years, they were ripe for Olson's reediting. The result is astonishing, for stereotypes have long since replaced the vivid realities of that moment; now, revivified, its actors spin back into action, misconceptions corrected, history set straight.

There are two particularly powerful scenes. In one, Stokely Carmichael interviews his own mother. What a subtle, complex, heartbreaking interview it is: he stubbornly but quietly presses her on why they were so poor, why his father was so often unemployed. She resists and resists, wants to be nice, and then finally: your father used to say it was because he was colored, they laid off the colored man first. Stokely, satisfied at last, sits back, case closed. Carmichael is remembered as a riveting orator: it's a revelation to see this intimate side of him.

Another amazing interview takes place between a Swedish reporter and Angela Davis in what's evidently a prison visiting room. She has a tremendous Afro and is keen to explain her positions and ideas but she won't suffer fools gladly, even here. The journalist tries to challenge her about

her position on violence "in the movement," but is stopped cold. Chapter and verse, Davis delivers a rebuttal: what it was like to grow up black in Birmingham, with the sound of bombs and shots fired by segregationists hellbent on terror. She lived next door to one of the four girls who died in the 1963 church bombing memorialized in *Four Little Girls*. Every word is spoken with a barely suppressed rage and a totally calm, explanatory voice. It's a remarkable dissection by one of our foremost thinkers of racism and its effects.

Ingeniously, Olsson made the decision to record contemporary figures (Erykah Badu, Robin Kelley, Talib Kweli, and Angela Davis today) commenting on the epoch represented in the rediscovered footage. He then layered their voices at intervals over the archival clips, without ever showing the speakers' faces. The result is a moving conversation between past and present, unhampered by modern intrusion, the spell of the past unbroken. His decisions have made it a deeply transformative work.

The other strongest documentaries look unflinchingly at today's challenges and injustices: old-fashioned approaches with a new power to captivate and, hopefully, motivate. *The Interrupters* by Steve James (of *Hoop Dreams* fame) tracks a group of ex-gangbangers from the Ceasefire organization as they work to rid their neighborhoods of violence. That's putting it way too dryly: James worked with Alex Kotlowitz to craft miniature dramas full of passion and the threat of catastrophe, all catalyzed by the extraordinary personalities of the Ceasefire soldiers battling for their communities' futures. The standout personality is Ameena Matthews, a gangster's daughter turned Muslim peacemaker, out in her car cruising the streets for trouble so she can intervene. A one-woman peace squad, she burns up the screen whenever she's on it. But the other figures that James and Kotlowitz track, all men hardened by prison and softened by a love of their communities, won the audience's heart as well. The Interrupters jumped on stage to applause, just the sort of Revival-show premiere that Sundance so often delivers.

Yoav Potash's *Crime After Crime* is a very different film in tone and purpose, yet it too tracks the path of injustice and violence. The story of Deborah Peagler, incarcerated nearly her whole life as an alleged accessory to the murder of her abuser, *Crime After Crime* is a three-hankie documentary. Telling Peagler's story through the work of the attorneys who work pro bono to free her, year after year, Potash uncovers the depths of corruption in the L.A. District Attorney's office. As months and then years of legal action pass by, Peagler becomes a larger-than-life figure of Shakespearian proportions. Potash never gave up, even devising ways to film her in prison, something usually prohibited. The documentary and the case became entangled in fascinating ways and suggest that filmmakers may have more power than they usually think they do.

Lots of people I respect loved *A Life In A Day*, the first crowd-sourced feature documentary, directed by Kevin Macdonald and produced by Ridley Scott. One part *Babies*, one part *Family of Man*, it comprises footage shot and submitted from all over the globe, edited into the kind of sunrise-to-sunset faux chronology typical of the early city-film genre, and sharing its lyricism. The day was July 24, 2010; the producers sent out 500 cameras to countries outside the west, and at Sundance they brought on stage the people who'd shot the best bits, flown in for the occasion. At least, I heard they did. I wasn't there to see them because I had fled halfway through, breaking the cardinal rule that specifies you must see it all if you want to attack it.

Here's the thing. Macdonald and Scott certainly know what they're doing, the film is masterfully assembled, all the heartstrings are pulled in all the right places, the treacle held at just the right temperature to set. Pondering the whole enterprise, it struck me as exactly the cultural version of how the developed world has always treated the developing world: take its natural resources, its raw footage, bring it all back home, and make it into a finished product yourselves that can be sold, marketed, seen, owned. But of course, I didn't see it all, so I didn't really say this.

In the New Frontiers section, installations aren't always time-based, so those rules of engagement don't apply. Lynn Hershman Leeson took her terrific new documentary, *!W.A.R. Women Art Revolution*, to the festival, but she also made it into a high-tech installation in which Wii controllers visualized as flashlights could literally illuminate history by activating the film's databases (its ongoing archive is open for interactive use at rawwar.org). In another building, Mark Boulos installed *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, in which he sandwiched the audience between two walls: on one, guerillas in the Niger Delta denounce foreign oil interests, prepare an intense ritual, and pile into a boat to go murder someone; on the other, traders on the floor of the Chicago futures exchange bid on the price of petroleum, frantically, until the trading reaches a crescendo. The contradictions and interconnections hang in the air, unresolved, as we pass uncomfortably through them, with nary an Interrupter in sight to save the day.

B. RUBY RICH is Professor of Social Documentation at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She served as a curator and selection committee member for Sundance in the 1980s and 90s and was a member of its competition jury in 2005.

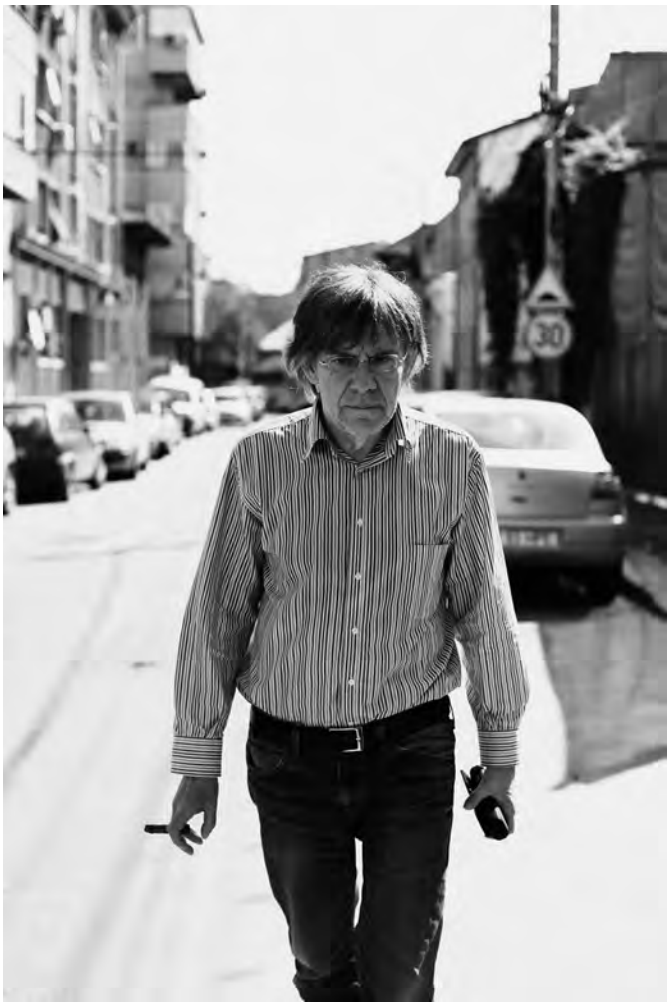
INTERVIEW WITH ANDREI UJICĂ

Videograms of a Revolution (1992) documents the December 1989 overthrow of Nicolae Ceauşescu's authoritarian regime in Romania. Co-directed by Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, the film adds a ruminative narration to found footage from numerous sources to create a sequential account of an event that could not be captured from any single viewpoint. At the start a timecoded video shows barely visible lines of people moving in the gap between two buildings: "from the window of a student dormitory in Timişoara an amateur video camera records demonstrators moving towards the center of the city," says the narrator. "The event has been shifted to the background; the camera gets as close to the event as the lens allows." Unspectacular, inexact—both the clip's content (the far-off drift of unidentifiable protesters) and its provenance (a nameless, frightened civilian videographer) contrast with the official imagery of dictatorship, which is closely fixated on a single person. The discrepancy is highlighted by the TV footage that follows. Speaking from a Bucharest balcony, the Romanian president endeavors to calm the huge and antagonistic crowd in front of him. It is to no avail and in another shot he is an uncharacteristically tiny figure in the distance, escaping the city by helicopter.

Ceauşescu failed to flee the country and at the end of *Videograms of a Revolution*, a TV news report shows him and his wife apparently being told that they have been sentenced to death. But it is hard to know exactly what is happening because all that can be heard is a soft electronic hum, which is eventually interrupted by the announcer's voice. Then the last videogram of Ceauşescu shows his corpse.

The man who ruled Romania for so long returns like a specter in Ujică's remarkable new film, *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceauşescu*, which begins where *Videograms of a Revolution* concluded, with the couple's hasty trial. This time, however, Ceauşescu's flustered voice is audible. He repudiates the proceedings as a "masquerade" but begins to defend his record before a cut takes us back to 1965 and the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, whom Ceauşescu succeeded as head of the Communist government. *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceauşescu* is another chronological narrative made up of found footage, but it covers twenty-four years not five days, and the Romanian dictator is the center of attention throughout. He receives flowers, attends party congresses, dances, meets other heads of state. Addressing a vast crowd in summer 1968, he denounces the August invasion of Czechoslovakia by other Eastern Bloc countries. He is greeted with honor by de Gaulle, Nixon, the British royal family, Brezhnev, Mao, and others. He and his wife take a cruise with Imelda Marcos and there is also more intimate footage which shows the president at leisure: hiking, hunting, playing volleyball.

Is this history or a home-movie anthology? History or a dream of history? Ujică includes pristine and radiant color film of a state visit to North Korea. After parading in a cavalcade through the streets Ceauşescu and Kim Il-sung sit together to watch a magnificently choreographed stadium



Andrei Ujică
Photo: Roald Aron.

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A kind of dream

The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceauşescu. Source: www.the-autobiography.com. Courtesy of Mandragora International.

pageant. The occasion includes a sort of widescreen celebration of Ceauşescu in the form of thousands of handheld cards that combine into images of heroic socialist leadership. No wonder the Romanian leader smiles as he observes the gaudy cult of his own personality.

There is almost no evidence of dissent or opposition in *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceauşescu*. The one striking exception is an incident recorded during the twelfth congress of the Romanian Communist Party in 1979: party veteran Constantin Pârvulescu speaks from the platform to claim that the re-election of Ceauşescu as Secretary General is being rigged. Confronted with this objection, the delegates rise as one to acclaim their leader, chanting "Ceauşescu and the people!"

By contrast with *Videograms of a Revolution*, Ujică supplies no analytic narration to guide viewers through his reconstruction of the imagery of dictatorship. He and editor Dana Bunescu do, however, disturb the film's pageantry through sound editing. Half-way through the film, there is a cut to a black screen over which screaming and commotion can be heard. On two subsequent occasions the president is seen inspecting urban architectural models and there is an odd mechanical clicking on the soundtrack. I interpreted the cries as an index of popular suffering under this regime and the clicking as the grinding gears of the state propaganda machine. However they are understood, these noises are like rips in the fabric of *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceauşescu*; for a few moments unruly, cryptic sounds suggest the world missing from the official pantomime.

This interview with Andrei Ujică was conducted by email in January 2010. His responses were translated by Andrada Romagno.†

Rob White: How did you come to work with Harun Farocki on *Videograms of a Revolution* and what was your project in making the film?

Andrei Ujică: as you may already know, I have a background in literature. I started to write as early as high school, prose at first, and that's when my passion for cinema also started. Unlike literature, however, I didn't do anything about it, always having this absurd conviction that one day this will happen by itself.

After I emigrated to Germany, in 1981, I was forced by circumstances to take a detour through theory. I got an assistant post at the University of Mannheim, with a specialty in literary theory and film theory. That's where the events of 1989 found me. In 1990 I published, together with Hubertus von Amelunxen, photography historian and theorist, a book called *Television/Revolution: The Ultimatum of the Images—Romania in December 1989*. It contained, among other things, four dialogues I had with Romanian intellectuals, friends from youth, two from Timişoara, two

December 1989
Videograms of a Revolution. © 1992, 2006 Harun Farocki Filmproduction. DVD: Facets Video.

from Bucharest, who had witnessed the events both at first hand and on TV.

Harun Farocki contacted me through the publishing house, expressing his interest in making a film adaptation of the dialogues and asking me if I wanted to help him. I told him it would be so much more interesting to make a film about what is not dealt with in the book, namely the videograms of that revolution. We decided to do it together.

The idea at the basis of the project can be summarized in this way: in 1989, a hundred cameras followed what was happening in Romania; history is no longer divided into theatrical scenes, nor into literary chapters—it is perceived as a sequence; and the sequence demands a film.

One of the narrator's main theoretical statements in *Videograms of a Revolution* is: "Since its invention, film has seemed destined to make history visible. It has been able to portray the past and to stage the present. We have seen Napoleon on horseback and Lenin on the train. Film was possible because there was history. Almost imperceptibly, like moving forward on a Möbius strip, the side was flipped. We look on and have to think: if film is possible then history too is possible." Are you a historian?

Inherently, any artist who transcribes his historical biography into his work is also a historian.

However, other statements should be added to the ones you mention, statements which were molded after the film was done and which sum up this problematic as follows: between December 21, 1989 (the day of Ceauşescu's last speech) and December 26, 1989 (the day of the first television reports of his trial) cameras at all the most important locations in Bucharest captured the events almost in their entirety. We have gathered all these various recordings together in order to reconstruct the visual chronology of these days. The aim was to disentangle the mass of images and to arrange sequences in such a way as to suggest that, for five days, one was moving from camera to camera on one and the same reel of film.

The prevailing artistic medium of an age has always had a determining influence on history. This is clearly the case in the Modern European Age. It has been influenced by theater, from Shakespeare to Schiller, and then by the novel, until Tolstoy. We know that the twentieth century is filmic. But it is only with the advent of the video camera, and the increased possibilities for lengthy and mobile recording it offers, that the process of the filmification of history can be completed.

As regards the statement "if film is possible, then history too is possible," it is in fact an ironic reference to the posthistoricist theses from the beginning of the 1990s, when it was being rumored that we have reached "the end of history". . .

The narrator also makes a statement about the experience of living in Romania during the dictatorship: the sense of time freezing, "the inertia of

fear"—a feeling of always being at war. Please say something about your own memory of living under this regime.

Besides these two feelings, the dominant frame of mind in that regime was that your life had been confiscated. As if the desideratum of that small, short-lived party from the beginning years of the Soviet Union, called The Immortalists, which asked for the nationalization of the time of one's life, as the last remnant of "private property," in opposition to the Bolshevik collectivist postulates, would have come true. With the films that make up this trilogy [Ujică also directed *Out of the Present*, in 1995] and especially with *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceauşescu*, I have the impression that I have gained back that section of my life nationalized in my youth.

I'm using here almost the concrete sense of the word, this being a process very similar to that of my wife's gaining back her family's estate, nationalized in 1949 and retroceded in 1997.

The *Autobiography of Nicolae Ceauşescu* is wholly composed of found footage. What kind of archival research was involved?

The advantage this project had, unlike *Videograms of a Revolution*, was that all images are stored in two big institutions: the Romanian Television Archive and the National Film Archive, which has also taken over the archives of the former Alexandru Sahia Documentary Studio.

During the twenty-five years he was in command, Ceauşescu was filmed on an average of probably one hour a day, which adds up to approximately 9000 hours. From this hypothetical corpus, around 1000 hours have survived. Two researchers, the filmmaker Titus Muntean and Velvet Moraru, the producer of the film, watched all this material and made a preselection, based on certain criteria set by myself. In general lines, this implied a chronological, year-by-year covering of Ceauşescu's political biography, with special attention dedicated to reel ends, where I was hoping to find moments from the beginning or end of shooting, which show real life fragments outside protocol. This work period lasted for a year.

The images thus preselected—around 260 hours—were watched and classified by myself together with Dana Bunescu, who later on did the editing and sound design of the film. A process for which we gave ourselves a lot of time and which took altogether another year. The result was that, when we started the image-editing, we knew the material so well that we were able to work from the start on the final version, which we finished five months later.

The film is mostly comprised of what looks like official newsreel footage, but there are also clips from what seem to be home movies. Can you explain the nature of the footage?

Ceauşescu liked to be filmed, so there are images with him in a private environment from early on. In the 1970s, the Sahia studio used to make quarterly rough cuts with this kind of images, which were given to him under the "discreet" title of "Recollections I–IV," to be watched with the family at their residence. In the second half of the 1970s, they reached the point where all his hunting trips were shot (and he went hunting most Sundays).

The "Recollections" portfolio ended up, together with the entire Sahia collection, at the National Film Archive. A series of these "state home movies," so to say, can also be found at the television archive. The two archives partly overlap because the same few cameramen with the highest protocol clearance were always involved. The security apparatus, as well as Ceauşescu himself, were averse to new faces in their entourage.

The film simulates a process of committing to memory and the association of official images with intimate ones fits perfectly this narrative convention. As a matter of fact, since our memories are both black-and-white and color, both mute and "with sound," they are a lot like a film archive, which makes our work easier.

Why did you call the film an *Autobiography*?

Any video archive of a chief of state is a protocol archive. Therefore the only point of view from which a cinematic story, limited to these images, can be built is an "autobiographical" one.

Is it a tragic narrative? For a while, Ceauşescu is a dynamic, vigorous figure—for example when he criticizes the invasion of Czechoslovakia. But by the end of the film he is a visibly shrunken man, visiting empty shops and living in what seems like a kind of bubble world of despots. He never relinquishes the language of revolutionary idealism. "I have relentlessly served the cause of socialism, the vital interests of our people," he says on receiving an honorary doctorate in 1973. Is this just hypocrisy or is there truly a measure of personal tragedy here?

Ceauşescu was indoctrinated when he was fifteen, an age which, as we know, predisposes to a lifetime of ideological rigidity. After that, he spent a great part of his youth in jail, where the idea that he had to seize power germinated and became a mission he had to accomplish. So he was anything but a hypocrite. That's why his biography, indeed, gradually takes on a tragic dimension. There is a Shakespearean touch in him, of a character captive to an evil beyond him, which "leads" his path. In the history of the ideology we are talking about it is, however, hard to draw a line between visionary and fanatic, liberator and tyrant, revolutionary and gangster.

There is electrifying footage of Constantin Pârvulescu denouncing the procedure by which Ceauşescu is being re-elected to the central committee

Pageantry

The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Courtesy of Mandragora International.

of the Romanian Communist Party. Why is this the only dissent seen in the film?

Because this is the only act of dissent that comes from within the political apparatus and which takes place in Ceauşescu's presence. These images owe their existence to the fact that the incident took place at a party congress and these were always recorded by the television in their entirety. At first I was surprised that the material wasn't erased immediately after the meeting. After a while I realized, however, that the propaganda machine knew its job very well. Those people were aware that, if it were ever needed, that tape could be used as proof of the unconditional solidarity with the leader. And that, even though anyone would have realized, by watching it, that the people in the audience were cheering first and foremost because they were scared to death, this very demonstration of fear disguised in loyalty confirmed the triumph of the apparatus over any attempt at dissent.

I could not always tell whether a song or piece of music had been added to the soundtrack by you—for example the version of "I Fought the Law" an hour into the film, which accompanies footage of dancing and urban bustle. In which cases did you actually add the music?

With the exception of a few parade choirs and marches, as well as the singer who performs on the stadium on Ceauşescu's sixtieth anniversary, all musical pieces were added by us. Over eighty percent of the images are mute because, for cost reasons, the sound recordings weren't archived. Hence almost the entire soundtrack of the film, except the fragments mentioned above and, of course, Ceauşescu's speeches, was designed by us. When period music was needed, we added period music. As for "I Fought the Law," it was a gift from Dana Bunescu. We had finished editing the shot with 1970 youth dance, something I put in the film because it reminded me of my high-school prom, which took place the same year, and we were looking for music to add to it. I remember listening for an entire day to "Like a Rolling Stone" with Bob Dylan in the legendary Manchester concert in May 1966, when he was called "Judas" from the audience and he answered "I don't believe you. You're a liar!" Unfortunately, this piece was in tune only with my state of mind and not with the images. At one point Dana, who was listening to other songs in her headphones, said: "Do you remember this one?" Then she played Bobby Fuller singing "I Fought the Law."

There are three uses of sound that seem to me like ruptures. First there is a rumbling noise like an earthquake, which then turns into screaming. Is this in a sense the sound of popular suffering that the official version of events refuses to acknowledge?

That sound fragment is a historical document. On the evening of March 4, 1977, at 9.22 p.m., a 7.3-magnitude earthquake hit Romania, destroying a vast part of Bucharest and having an impact on the entire southern area of the country. At that very time, the Radio Hall was hosting a symphonic concert. The earthquake took place during the break, but a magnetophone was on in the recording cabin, to "catch the background," as they say. It recorded a little over twenty seconds of earthquake noise, half of the total duration. We wanted to give this acoustic document a context fitting its gravity, that's why we put it on black. We were, however, aware that in this way it would also gain the meaning you're referring to.

Then, on two subsequent occasions, you include footage of Ceauşescu inspecting architectural models. Both times, a clicking sound intrudes. Please explain what is happening here.

In this case, we have a real acoustic abstraction. The sound that can be heard in both scenes with architectural models is a musical composition: *Symphonic Poem for 100 Metronomes* by György Ligeti.

Although your film is a found-footage documentary, I think it has something in common with certain films in the Romanian New Wave of fiction films: for example *Police, Adjective* and *Aurora*. There is a shared sense of slow menace and a shared lack of contextual explanation. Do you see any connection?

We are dealing here with "the two faces of reality" in cinema. While I start from fragments of reality, which I try to compress through syntactic devices into an aesthetic discourse, the Romanian New Wave directors start from an aesthetic presumption, which they try to dilate through morphological means until it becomes fragments of reality. We find ourselves, to go back to the image we started with, on the two different sides of a Möbius strip, with neither of us being able to identify the point where it twists.

In one 1960s sequence, a pop song is heard with the lyrics: "Remember that in life, a smile drives the tears away. Forget about your pain. Don't be blue." Do memories of the dictatorship still bring pain? Is Ceauşescu starting to be forgotten now or is he like a ghost haunting Romania and Romanian cinema?

Before becoming abstract, a historical figure of this kind usually traumatizes its own nation *in personam* and as a ghost for about one hundred years. Thus, we find ourselves roughly at Ceauşescu's halfway "presence" in Romania. During this sort of periods, art, and nowadays mainly cinema, usually takes on a psychotherapeutic function over collective trauma.

†Thanks to Magda Stroe, Deputy Director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in London, for facilitating this interview.

DAVID STERRITT

Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism by Stephen Prince

Various critics and scholars have explored connections between American cinema and the so-called war on terror, but Stephen Prince's well-organized study *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* is the most systematic and comprehensive volume on the subject to date. Prince is a diligent researcher with special expertise in the fields of screen politics and violence, so this is a natural extension of his previous work; and early on he offers a personal note as well. While he was researching 9/11 documentaries in spring 2007, a deranged student at his university, Virginia Tech, went on a shooting rampage that killed thirty-two students and teachers. With violence and death abroad both near and far, Prince stopped to ask himself whether he should continue to work on this troubling subject at this troubled time. The reason he gives for doing so is uncomplicated and sincere: "the feeling that there was some virtue to be found in not looking away from 9/11" (16).

A large irony here, not directly stated by Prince but implicit in the chapters that follow, is that so many films *do* look away from important aspects of mass destruction in our time, or look toward them from such oblique or distorted perspectives that the effect is the same. Pictures in the vein of John McTiernan's action thriller *Die Hard* (1988) spin terrorism as entertainment, often treating mechanisms of massive violence (e.g., explosions and fireballs) in a "voluptuous and sensuous way" (39). Steven Spielberg says his allegorical *War of the Worlds* (2005) looks into "how this much catastrophe can bring about that much healing" (88)—leave it to the director of *Schindler's List* (1993) to find the sunshiny side of atrocity—but omits the cooperative spirit of 9/11 first responders and evacuees, focusing instead on panic, conflict, and antisocial rage. Oliver Stone's timid *World Trade Center* (2006) tells "a story about life" (106) that forgets to be about death as well, shying away from the slaughter's horrifying scale and celebrating Christian righteousness to a degree that suggests precisely the kind of religious-crusade outlook that Islamists ascribe to their holy war against the West (104–5). Internet crazies make video "documentaries" along the lines of Dylan Avery's *Loose Change Final Cut* (2007), which informs us (among other things) that Flight 93 actually landed in Cleveland, where government agents promptly disappeared the passengers. Fox's infamous TV series *24* finds torturing terrorists a source of sadistic glee. And so on.

Not every film of the 9/11 era is as dispiriting as these, and Prince finds quite a few to commend. The fiction movies include Paul Greengrass's *United 93* (2006), a forceful drama despite some departures from the historical record, and Spike Lee's *25th Hour* (2002), with its inspired commingling of private and public loss. I agree with Prince about those pictures, and I also agree that the most penetrating treatments of 9/11 have yet to be produced; due to skittishness in the film industry, squeamishness among moviegoers, or both, Prince rightly notes, no 9/11 picture has matched the "conceptual daring and imaginative accomplishment" of Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam epic *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Most of the films that stand out for Prince are documentaries on the order of *WTC: The First 24 Hours* (2001) and *7 Days in September* (2004). His analysis of *In Memoriam: New York City* (2002) is one of the most sophisticated in the book, observing that the film gazes directly at some of the most horrific sights of 9/11—bodies falling from the towers and lying smashed on the pavement below—and then moves on to material that builds a context of "heroism, patriotism, and religious transcendence" (140), proposing that membership in a community can ameliorate the hatred and rage that brought these events into being. The film's structure thus has a "substitutional logic" whereby "progressive and redemptive perspectives subsume the toxins of experience" (140–41). One needn't concur with the conclusions of that logic to see that many post-9/11 documentaries employ this very strategy.

I question some of Prince's critical judgments—for example, the flag symbolism in Paul Haggis's *In the Valley of Elah* (2007) may have "the subtlety of a kick in the head" (299), but it gets its point powerfully across—and some of his conclusions are underwhelming, as when he writes that the commercial failure of several 9/11-related movies in late 2007 gave Hollywood the news that moviegoers prefer "entertainment" to "disquieting reminders of intractable realities" (304). Surely the studios have known this for about a century. Prince can't be blamed for missing late-breaking films like Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* (2008) and Oren Moverman's *The Messenger* (2009), but I'm stumped by his omission of Stephen Gaghan's *Syriana* (2005) and Adam Curtis's *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear* (2004), which hails from Britain but deserves at least a mention. Prince could also have cited the analysis of 9/11 in W. J. T. Mitchell's 2005 book, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and*

Loves of Images (University of Chicago Press), the most penetrating study of the subject I've seen, taking the attacks to be conjoined acts of icon destruction and icon creation. Quibbles aside, however, *Firestorm* is a valuable addition to current discourse about mass destruction in the mass media, bringing fresh insight to the still-daunting task of not looking away from 9/11. © 2011 David Sterritt

DAVID STERRITT, chief book critic of *Film Quarterly* and film professor at Columbia University, wrote "Representing Atrocity: From the Holocaust to September 11" for the collection *Film and Television After 9/11* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

BOOK DATA Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. $87.50 cloth; $27.50 paper. 388 pages.

MARTIN FRADLEY

The Cinema of David Cronenberg: From Baron of Blood to Cultural Hero by Ernest Mathijs

David Cronenberg: Author or Filmmaker? by Mark Browning

David Cronenberg developed a cult following as the maker of lurid but arty SF/horror films—from *Shivers* (1975) to *eXistenZ* (1999)—replete with such monstrous apparitions as exploding heads, talking assholes, fecal parasites, and psychotic gynaecologists. Recently the Canadian director has surprised some by producing more mainstream thrillers, *A History of Violence* (2005) and *Eastern Promises* (2007), with *A Dangerous Method*—a drama about Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung—due out this year. Now regarded as an established auteur, Cronenberg has always attracted serious criticism and scholarship, notably William Beard's comprehensive study, *The Artist as Monster: The Cinema of David Cronenberg* (Toronto University Press, 2006). But the literature stretches back to Piers Handling's groundbreaking edited collection, *The Shape of Rage* (General Publishing, 1983), and also includes Michael Grant's anthology, *The Modern Fantastic: The Films of David Cronenberg* (Greenwood Press, 2000), and two collections of interviews: *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, edited by Chris Rodley (Faber and Faber, 1997) and *David Cronenberg: Interviews with Serge Grünberg* (Plexus Publishing, 2005). There is also a slim biography by Peter Morris, *A Delicate Balance* (ECW Press, 1994), as well as four monographs on individual films: Tim Lucas's *Videodrome: Studies in the Horror Film* (Centipede Press, 2008), Michael Grant's *Dead Ringers* (Flicks Books, 1997), Iain Sinclair's *Crash* (BFI Modern Classics, 1996), and Bart Beaty's *A History of Violence* (University of Toronto Press, 2008). Finally, the censorious furore surrounding the U.K. release of *Crash* has been soberingly written up by Martin Barker and others in *The Crash Controversy: Censorship Campaigns and Film Reception* (Wallflower Press, 2001). This is an impressive bibliography for a sometime left-field director, and it is growing steadily, as the volumes under review attest.

Ernest Mathijs in *The Cinema of David Cronenberg: From Baron of Blood to Cultural Hero* calls Cronenberg "one of the most influential filmmakers of the last three decades" (8). Avoiding the theorizing that often appears in Cronenberg studies, Mathijs combines textual analysis and reception studies in order to approach in a dialectical fashion the relationship between the films and the broader culture. Moving chronologically through the *oeuvre*, Mathijs is especially successful when he looks beyond the major career landmarks. He undertakes, for example, a detailed revisionist analysis of the neglected *Fast Company* (1979) in addition to providing useful commentary on Cronenberg's various acting roles. And he turns up intriguing information about well-known film projects that Cronenberg discussed with producers at an early stage, which make up "a micro-canon of mid-1980s Hollywood cinema" (143). That Cronenberg was in discussions about *Total Recall* (1990) and *American Psycho* (2000) makes sense . . . but *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Flashdance* (both 1984), and *Top Gun* (1986)? One would have to be extremely glum not to enjoy the perverse idea of a Cronenberg-helmed *Top Gun*—arguably *the* definitive example of Reaganite cinema—and these associations are testament to the director's steadily rising stock.

Mathijs is particularly interested in how the films reflect or even anticipate cultural anxieties. The link made between sex and disease in the controversial *Shivers* and *Rabid* (1977) unnervingly prefigures the AIDS epidemic, for example. Both these "body horror" films were loudly condemned for their supposedly reactionary sexual politics. Such controversy bolstered Cronenberg's profile and *Scanners* (1980)—a conflation of corporate conspiracy thriller, techno-medical paranoia, and visceral horror, its celebrated exploding head shot becoming enshrined as "the cult equivalent of *Psycho*'s shower scene" (99)—was a mainstream box-office hit. Mathijs also documents the way in which *Videodrome* became embroiled in the politically regressive "video nasties" debate upon its release in 1982. The film also attracted the admiring gaze of the academic community, which responded with cross-references to Baudrillard, Descartes, Klee, and McLuhan. Despite concerns in some quarters about the multiplex-friendly tone of Cronenberg's more recent films, Mathijs

Loves of Images (University of Chicago Press), the most penetrating study of the subject I've seen, taking the attacks to be conjoined acts of icon destruction and icon creation. Quibbles aside, however, *Firestorm* is a valuable addition to current discourse about mass destruction in the mass media, bringing fresh insight to the still-daunting task of not looking away from 9/11. © 2011 David Sterritt

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David Cronenberg: Author or Filmmaker? by Mark Browning

David Cronenberg developed a cult following as the maker of lurid but arty SF/horror films—from *Shivers* (1975) to *eXistenZ* (1999)—replete with such monstrous apparitions as exploding heads, talking assholes, fecal parasites, and psychotic gynaecologists. Recently the Canadian director has surprised some by producing more mainstream thrillers, *A History of Violence* (2005) and *Eastern Promises* (2007), with *A Dangerous Method*—a drama about Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung—due out this year. Now regarded as an established auteur, Cronenberg has always attracted serious criticism and scholarship, notably William Beard's comprehensive study, *The Artist as Monster: The Cinema of David Cronenberg* (Toronto University Press, 2006). But the literature stretches back to Piers Handling's groundbreaking edited collection, *The Shape of Rage* (General Publishing, 1983), and also includes Michael Grant's anthology, *The Modern Fantastic: The Films of David Cronenberg* (Greenwood Press, 2000), and two collections of interviews: *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, edited by Chris Rodley (Faber and Faber, 1997) and *David Cronenberg: Interviews with Serge Grünberg* (Plexus Publishing, 2005). There is also a slim biography by Peter Morris, *A Delicate Balance* (ECW Press, 1994), as well as four monographs on individual films: Tim Lucas's *Videodrome: Studies in the Horror Film* (Centipede Press, 2008), Michael Grant's *Dead Ringers* (Flicks Books, 1997), Iain Sinclair's *Crash* (BFI Modern Classics, 1996), and Bart Beaty's *A History of Violence* (University of Toronto Press, 2008). Finally, the censorious furore surrounding the U.K. release of *Crash* has been soberingly written up by Martin Barker and others in *The Crash Controversy: Censorship Campaigns and Film Reception* (Wallflower Press, 2001). This is an impressive bibliography for a sometime left-field director, and it is growing steadily, as the volumes under review attest.

Ernest Mathijs in *The Cinema of David Cronenberg: From Baron of Blood to Cultural Hero* calls Cronenberg "one of the most influential filmmakers of the last three decades" (8). Avoiding the theorizing that often appears in Cronenberg studies, Mathijs combines textual analysis and reception studies in order to approach in a dialectical fashion the relationship between the films and the broader culture. Moving chronologically through the *oeuvre*, Mathijs is especially successful when he looks beyond the major career landmarks. He undertakes, for example, a detailed revisionist analysis of the neglected *Fast Company* (1979) in addition to providing useful commentary on Cronenberg's various acting roles. And he turns up intriguing information about well-known film projects that Cronenberg discussed with producers at an early stage, which make up "a micro-canon of mid-1980s Hollywood cinema" (143). That Cronenberg was in discussions about *Total Recall* (1990) and *American Psycho* (2000) makes sense . . . but *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Flashdance* (both 1984), and *Top Gun* (1986)? One would have to be extremely glum not to enjoy the perverse idea of a Cronenberg-helmed *Top Gun*—arguably *the* definitive example of Reaganite cinema—and these associations are testament to the director's steadily rising stock.

Mathijs is particularly interested in how the films reflect or even anticipate cultural anxieties. The link made between sex and disease in the controversial *Shivers* and *Rabid* (1977) unnervingly prefigures the AIDS epidemic, for example. Both these "body horror" films were loudly condemned for their supposedly reactionary sexual politics. Such controversy bolstered Cronenberg's profile and *Scanners* (1980)—a conflation of corporate conspiracy thriller, techno-medical paranoia, and visceral horror, its celebrated exploding head shot becoming enshrined as "the cult equivalent of *Psycho*'s shower scene" (99)—was a mainstream box-office hit. Mathijs also documents the way in which *Videodrome* became embroiled in the politically regressive "video nasties" debate upon its release in 1982. The film also attracted the admiring gaze of the academic community, which responded with cross-references to Baudrillard, Descartes, Klee, and McLuhan. Despite concerns in some quarters about the multiplex-friendly tone of Cronenberg's more recent films, Mathijs

argues that they remain as politically charged and culturally relevant as ever. *Eastern Promises* explores immigration, diasporic communities, and shifting notions of family. The murderous past concealed by *A History of Violence*'s seemingly wholesome paterfamilias, meanwhile, is interpreted as a savage critique of the Bush administration's ruthless mixture of family-values rhetoric and military adventurism. *The Cinema of David Cronenberg* admirably situates the films in wider contexts, astutely discussing for instance the development of special effects in the 1980s. Inevitably some sections are weaker than others—I wish Mathijs had more fully engaged with the impressive work that has been done on *M. Butterfly* (1993) from postcolonial and queer perspectives, for example—and there is too much reliance on excessively detailed plot summaries. Overall, however, this is an absorbing and readable volume that amply demonstrates the richness of Cronenberg's work.

The son of bibliophile parents who nurtured his early ambitions to become a full-time writer, Cronenberg has never been shy of citing literary influences. Allusions in interview to Ballard, Burroughs, and Nabokov are commonplace, and Cronenberg has repeatedly based films on novels, beginning in 1983 with his screen version of Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*. (Cronenberg also published his own first novel, *Consumed*, in 2010.) In *David Cronenberg: Author or Filmmaker?*, Mark Browning sets out "to consider how comparisons between literary texts and Cronenberg's films can highlight features of his work that have remained relatively neglected by critics" (8). Browning is interested not only in direct adaptation, but also (more amorphously) in the way literary texts are the films' "analogous material"; so, for example, Browning links narrative events in *eXistenZ* to the fatwa placed on novelist Salman Rushdie following the publication of *The Satantic Verses* (1988). A compelling chapter on *Dead Ringers* (1988) intelligently questions received wisdom, persuasively arguing that the movie owes substantially greater debt to Bari Wood and Jack Geasland's source novel, *Twins* (1977), than Cronenberg has been willing to admit. Similarly, Browning's overview of Cronenberg's *The Naked Lunch* (1991)—a fantastical psychodrama about the creation of William Burroughs's "unfilmable" novel—exemplifies the complex nature of Cronenberg's literary borrowings. Though Browning is sometimes skeptical about the director's claim to be affiliated to such illustrious predecessors as Beckett, Brecht, and Dostoevsky, he points out that Cronenberg has long encouraged audiences to perceive the films' derelict male heroes as versions of the misunderstood auteur. Cronenberg "has consistently portrayed the artist according to quintessential Romantic tenets: a writer, misunderstood, unappreciated by his own time and culture, uses a personal form of language to express his . . . unique view of the world" (193). But Browning nevertheless gives due acknowledgment to the director's persistent exploration of the psychology (and neurosis) of writing in *Crash*, *The Naked Lunch*, and *Spider* (2002).

Browning asserts that "understanding specific passages of certain writers will illuminate features of Cronenberg's literary aesthetic" (47), and while the book certainly makes a case for thinking about the "anxiety of influence" in the Cronenberg *oeuvre*, it surely pushes it too far. It may be true that funding for Cronenberg's experimental film *Stereo* (1969) was gained from the Canada Council under the auspices of writing a Nabokov-style novel—Cronenberg covertly avowing that he wanted to "produce a film that is really a book" (42)—but the four decades of accomplished *filmmaking* since have seen the director move beyond any slavish devotion to literary forefathers. Yet Browning claims that the literary dimension becomes more and more important: after *Videodrome*, Cronenberg's work "does not appeal directly to the visceral nerve-endings of the audience but to their literary sensibilities" (35). After the widely recognized artistic breakthrough he made with *Videodrome*, Browning claims, Cronenberg's cinema increasingly displays a more "literary" style: "Camera movement is slow, acting styles are languorous, dialogue is often delivered with a ponderous deliberation and easily won emotions are avoided. We are forced to think and 'read' what we see, not experience the visceral thrill of a *Scanners*-style exploding head" (35). But these aspects of the later films could just as easily be described as visual and cinematic. Browning tends to overplay literary connections, as when he asserts that the memorable fight scene in *Eastern Promises* is an allusion to Shakespeare's *Othello* but does not go on to consider the influence of the famous Turkish baths scene in Orson Welles's 1952 filmed adaptation of the play. An otherwise perceptive discussion of *Crash* finds tenuous "literary connections" (47) with, among others, Keats, Forster, and Eliot; undeniably thought-provoking, are these connections really more instructive than comparisons with the work of non-literary peers such as Atom Egoyan or even the brooding art rock of the late-1970s band Joy Division? It is, however, certainly the case that Cronenberg continues to draw directly from literature: an adaptation of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* is currently in post-production. Its somewhat quixotic tendencies aside, *David Cronenberg: Author or Filmmaker* is an intriguing, thoughtful contribution. The book indicates again the extent to which Cronenberg studies con-

tinue to flourish long after the director gained international notoriety as the "King of Venereal Horror." © 2011 Martin Fradley

MARTIN FRADLEY is currently editing a book about British filmmaker Shane Meadows.

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INA RAE HARK

It's the Pictures that Got Small: Hollywood Film Stars on 1950s Television by Christine Becker

The 1950s were an unsettling time to be a film actor. The 1948 *Paramount* decision in which the courts instructed the Hollywood film studios to divest themselves of their theater chains, along with other factors which would see the bottom fall out of weekly movie attendance, had put an end to the dependable contract work that many had been able to rely upon. At the same time, a brand new medium, television, offered acting opportunities. From a mere surface interrogation, it all looked pretty simple. Those stars the studios still valued or those who could make lucrative deals as independents stayed in the movies. The struggling, fading, and cast-off had a devalued fallback that could at least preserve an income while permitting the continuation of an acting career.

Christine Becker's lucid, richly detailed, and perceptive study proves just how superficial such an assessment would be. She sketches out myriad factors that influenced the ways in which Hollywood stars chose to go to television and television tried to woo Hollywood stars. Did the star play him or herself or a fictional character? Was the program live or filmed, network or syndicated, shot in New York or Los Angeles, an anthology or a continuing-character format? How did the performer's previous star image tie into the ways that television showcased him or her? How did gender and genre factor in? What made some stars click with television audiences while others of equal or greater reputation as film stars failed? Becker also subsumes these considerations into a larger historical arc. It begins when the television industry needs star luster to win network affiliates and persuade consumers to buy television sets, a business model that saw ad agencies and sponsors making most production decisions; and it ends a scant decade later with the home television market saturated, network–affiliate relations stable, and programs mostly developed by film studios who saw television as a place in which to audition and promote future stars rather than needing the more expensive participation of established ones. The new business model, Becker notes, "strove to regularize viewership, control costs, and reap syndication profits" (215).

Becker devotes each chapter to one particular aspect of the move by film stars onto television. Each follows the same format: a wide-ranging and detailed survey comes first, sketching out the main issues; this is followed by discussion of trade reviews, star interviews, network publicity, and descriptions of some of the programs in question; to finish, there is a focused case study. The first chapter, on the production of new careers in television for film stars, is an account so historically grounded and convincing in its arguments that it would make an excellent assignment in any course taking an industrial approach to Hollywood film of the 1950s. It concludes with the example of Four Star Productions and how Dick Powell, along with David Niven and Charles Boyer, took stewardship of their television careers. The next chapter, on stars playing themselves in various presentational genres, focuses on Faye Emerson. The third, on the now extinct performance category of anthology-drama hosts, uses Adolphe Menjou as its exemplar.

Chapter 4 deals with what Becker calls "continuing-character" roles, concentrating on the sitcom. She emphasizes the opportunities these presented especially to second-tier female movie stars and then provides an extended analysis of the Ida Lupino–Howard Duff *Mr. Adams and Eve*, in which the then-married stars played fictionalized versions of themselves. Finally she considers the prestige anthology drama, zeroing in on *Playhouse 90*, the most acclaimed of all but a show that debuted at nearly the moment when the genre was dying. In detailing the ascent of James Garner from 1950s television-bred favorite to bona fide movie star, the first part of Becker's conclusion sums up the transition away from television's love affair with the film actor. The book finishes with the most famous example of a less-than-A-list film performer who became a television icon, Lucille Ball, focusing on those episodes when Lucy Ricardo went to Hollywood and met many of the big-time stars the networks could only dream of hooking as continuing characters.

From its pitch-perfect title to its many insights as to how discourses of television stardom, which emphasized authenticity and true acting ability through live performance and "off-casting," "laid bare . . . the skeletons of the constructed star image" (9), Becker's book draws much-needed attention

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to the profundity of the sea change in media stardom that occurred due to the emergence of television. One hopes it paves the way for similar studies of the film–television star nexus in other eras. In addition to savoring these accomplishments, a reader can take pleasure in the sheer wealth of documentary evidence—including fourteen pages listing all "established film actors" who showed up on the small screen from 1948–61. And, since the likelihood of *The Loretta Young Show* or *Kraft Television Theatre* (let alone *Meet Mr. McNutley* or *The Betty Hutton Show*) appearing in a glossily packaged DVD set is almost nil, readers can enjoy *It's the Pictures that Got Small* simply because it brings to vivid life an era of broadcasting fast receding from memory. © 2011 Ina Rae Hark

INA RAE HARK is Distinguished Professor Emerita, University of South Carolina.

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MARCIA BUTZEL

Dying Swans and Madmen: Ballet, the Body, and Narrative Cinema by Adrienne L. McLean

In this informative and strikingly well-researched study, Adrienne McLean says "ballet has been ubiquitous in American cinema, appearing over and over again in film after film, decade after decade, across one century and into another" (5). *Dying Swans and Madmen* more than succeeds in demonstrating that ballet and American cinema have a substantial history together. This multidimensional book is also an inquiry into film genre and production, a case study of American cultural hierarchy, a discussion of the gendered body, and a social and cultural history of American ballet. Its premise is that Hollywood has shaped popular conceptions of ballet, while ballet's history in America has influenced cinematic representations of the art. In turn, theatrical ballet has absorbed Hollywood's image of the art . . . and so goes an interchange hitherto largely hidden from scholars' radar.

Ballet dancing features in films in a variety of ways. It can be incidental, a set piece rather than a main theme. There are a very few films in which ballet is the cynosure, notably Powell and Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948), which gets a chapter to itself in *Dying Swans and Madmen*. Some others, such as Robert Altman's semi-documentary, *The Company* (2003), depict ballet dancing "realistically." McLean, however, is chiefly concerned with a surprisingly large group of popular films whose stories revolve around dancing, including such well-known titles as *Grand Hotel* (1932), *The Turning Point* (1977), and *Billy Elliot* (2000) as well as more obscure films such as *The Dancer's Peril* (1917), *The Mad Genius* (1931), and *The Story of Three Loves* (1953).

Ballet emerges in cinema "as a mode of theatrical performance," but also, according to McLean, "as an embodied and lived relationship to personal identity and fate . . . as a mood or affect" (6), and as "a constant arbiter of [American] mass-cultural ambivalence about art, especially art that depends on an aestheticized performing body" (256). Using a cultural studies approach, McLean shows her subject to be complex and multifaceted. Women are frequently the protagonists, but not always; male roles and configurations of masculinity are also considered. Though one might expect dancing itself to be the essential signifier, costume, décor, music, and dialogue also need to be carefully considered. A protagonist might even be an "offstage icon," never dancing on screen (such as Greta Garbo's Gruskinskaya in *Grand Hotel*), though since *The Red Shoes*, this has become unusual, with central characters dancing on screen, as Natalie Portman's Nina does in *Black Swan* (2010). Although post-studio era ballet films vary in their narratives, form, and ideology, they tend to rework earlier conventions and iconography at the same time. In so doing, recent examples "offer new ways to think about identity politics—race especially—and the relationship of art and life, or art and entertainment, or the performativity of the dancing as well as nondancing body" (33).

The book deploys archival research and ideas from apposite sources in film, dance, gender, and cultural studies. McLean expertly traces ballet's history in America, including the monopoly of "Russianballet" and the Americanization (yet racial segregation) of concert dance. Enhanced by a variety of contemporary illustrations, including publicity photos and press-book materials, the volume's organization is also effective. Chronology orders the whole, but does not by default organize the book. For the most part, chapters focus on topics rather than time periods. While the films explored include comedies, tragic melodramas, musicals, biopics, coming-of-age dramas, and even war and espionage films, the themes of the ballet film are most related to the musical and the melodrama. Drawing from genre scholarship, McLean engages Richard Dyer's work on the musical and Ben Singer's and Steve Neale's studies of melodrama, making especially productive use of disparities in views of melodrama to understand the "ballet meller." For example, *Days*

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of Glory (1944), *Meet Me in Las Vegas* (1956), and *The Company*—films as varied by genre as by release date—all negotiate a vision of ballet associated, on the one hand, with melancholy, disease, or death, and on the other, with visual and musical beauty, agency, and a "sense of somatic accomplishment" (255).

McLean's book is a unique contribution to the rare studies of cinema and dance. In cinema studies, the most influential work deals with a single genre (the musical), though important exceptions are Gaylyn Studlar's essays on the influence of visual styles, themes, and stars of dance on silent Hollywood cinema. Dance criticism has long discussed the archival difficulties of an art based in live performance, lamented distortions in stage-to-screen adaptations, or advocated experimental works specifically "choreographed for camera"—while largely ignoring commercial cinema. Linking ballet films' potential meanings to "popular literature and theater, ballets, biography, and topical events, and ultimately, other films" (65), McLean's interpretations derive from intertextual relationships likely to be fresh discoveries for many readers.

Surely one of the subject's biggest challenges is the quality of many of the films. As McLean candidly writes, "if some of the most resonant films as fantasies of achievement are awful as records of ballet in performance, some of the most beautiful dancing takes place in films whose stories and characterizations are risible, trivial, or insulting" (255). Transcending the films' drawbacks, *Dying Swans and Madmen* is an exceptional and eloquent study of American cinema in a comparative arts mode. © 2011 Marcia Butzel

MARCIA BUTZEL is Associate Professor of Screen Studies at Clark University.

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GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

What is Cinema? by André Bazin

Who actually reads Bazin these days—apart, that is, from university lecturers and their students, poring over PDFs or photocopies of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" or "De Sica: Metteur en Scène"? And, above all, who reads him as a man of his time, rather than a purveyor of timeless truths—or non-truths, as the lecturer has more likely just told you?

I ask this because, until the other day when faced with the task of writing this review of a new selection of Bazin's major writings, I realize that for many years I hadn't actually read him myself. The four volumes of the original *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (1958–65) have lain neglected on my bookshelf, occasionally disturbed when I needed to check them for some minor detail of translation, but certainly unread in any serious sense.

Reading him again has been a revelation. I always thought of him as a great thinker but a poor stylist, whether read in the original or in any of the existing translations. Now I am more forgiving. The clumsy sentences (and there are many) are almost all the fruit of an intense struggle not just to express some crucial thought but to communicate it, and a thought, moreover, whose communication was urgent. The things he was saying needed to be grasped in their entirety if people were to understand, not just what cinema was, but why it mattered.

What was cinema, then, for Bazin and his contemporaries? The past tense here is important. Bazin and his editors (Jacques Rivette and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze in particular) were asking a question of the present, that of a postwar France multiply divided between ex-resisters and ex-collaborators, between pro- and anti-Communists, between (as ever) Catholics and secularists. Divided too into those who went to the cinema for Saturday-night entertainment and those who felt that cinema was, or should be, something more than that—or not only that but something more as well. Bazin was mainly read by people who believed in cinema as something more as well, but he also wanted to coax out of their philistinism people who thought that either only art cinema was art or that cinema was not art at all. Moreover his situation was a conflicted one. He was temperamentally left-wing but in polemic with the Stalinist left, a Catholic but hostile to right-wing Catholic bigotry, and an avant-gardist but one who believed that the self-styled avant-gardes had been historically superseded.

All Bazin's essays are about what cinema shares with other more established art forms while being in some fundamental way different from all of them. And all in some way or other address the situation in which he found himself. They take as a starting point the idea that not just film culture but culture as a whole was being rebuilt on a new basis. American films were flowing back onto French screens. (*Citizen Kane*, released in the U.S. in 1941, did not make it to France until 1946.) Italy, with neorealism (or, as he calls it, "the Italian school of the Liberation"), was building a new cinema out of the ashes of Fascism and war. What might this all mean for film culture in France?

of Glory (1944), *Meet Me in Las Vegas* (1956), and *The Company*—films as varied by genre as by release date—all negotiate a vision of ballet associated, on the one hand, with melancholy, disease, or death, and on the other, with visual and musical beauty, agency, and a "sense of somatic accomplishment" (255).

McLean's book is a unique contribution to the rare studies of cinema and dance. In cinema studies, the most influential work deals with a single genre (the musical), though important exceptions are Gaylyn Studlar's essays on the influence of visual styles, themes, and stars of dance on silent Hollywood cinema. Dance criticism has long discussed the archival difficulties of an art based in live performance, lamented distortions in stage-to-screen adaptations, or advocated experimental works specifically "choreographed for camera"—while largely ignoring commercial cinema. Linking ballet films' potential meanings to "popular literature and theater, ballets, biography, and topical events, and ultimately, other films" (65), McLean's interpretations derive from intertextual relationships likely to be fresh discoveries for many readers.

Surely one of the subject's biggest challenges is the quality of many of the films. As McLean candidly writes, "if some of the most resonant films as fantasies of achievement are awful as records of ballet in performance, some of the most beautiful dancing takes place in films whose stories and characterizations are risible, trivial, or insulting" (255). Transcending the films' drawbacks, *Dying Swans and Madmen* is an exceptional and eloquent study of American cinema in a comparative arts mode. © 2011 Marcia Butzel

MARCIA BUTZEL is Associate Professor of Screen Studies at Clark University.

BOOK DATA Adrienne L. McLean, *Dying Swans and Madmen: Ballet, the Body, and Narrative Cinema.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008. $139.99 cloth; $26.95 paper. 320 pages.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

What is Cinema? by André Bazin

Who actually reads Bazin these days—apart, that is, from university lecturers and their students, poring over PDFs or photocopies of "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" or "De Sica: Metteur en Scène"? And, above all, who reads him as a man of his time, rather than a purveyor of timeless truths—or non-truths, as the lecturer has more likely just told you?

I ask this because, until the other day when faced with the task of writing this review of a new selection of Bazin's major writings, I realize that for many years I hadn't actually read him myself. The four volumes of the original *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (1958–65) have lain neglected on my bookshelf, occasionally disturbed when I needed to check them for some minor detail of translation, but certainly unread in any serious sense.

Reading him again has been a revelation. I always thought of him as a great thinker but a poor stylist, whether read in the original or in any of the existing translations. Now I am more forgiving. The clumsy sentences (and there are many) are almost all the fruit of an intense struggle not just to express some crucial thought but to communicate it, and a thought, moreover, whose communication was urgent. The things he was saying needed to be grasped in their entirety if people were to understand, not just what cinema was, but why it mattered.

What was cinema, then, for Bazin and his contemporaries? The past tense here is important. Bazin and his editors (Jacques Rivette and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze in particular) were asking a question of the present, that of a postwar France multiply divided between ex-resisters and ex-collaborators, between pro- and anti-Communists, between (as ever) Catholics and secularists. Divided too into those who went to the cinema for Saturday-night entertainment and those who felt that cinema was, or should be, something more than that—or not only that but something more as well. Bazin was mainly read by people who believed in cinema as something more as well, but he also wanted to coax out of their philistinism people who thought that either only art cinema was art or that cinema was not art at all. Moreover his situation was a conflicted one. He was temperamentally left-wing but in polemic with the Stalinist left, a Catholic but hostile to right-wing Catholic bigotry, and an avant-gardist but one who believed that the self-styled avant-gardes had been historically superseded.

All Bazin's essays are about what cinema shares with other more established art forms while being in some fundamental way different from all of them. And all in some way or other address the situation in which he found himself. They take as a starting point the idea that not just film culture but culture as a whole was being rebuilt on a new basis. American films were flowing back onto French screens. (*Citizen Kane*, released in the U.S. in 1941, did not make it to France until 1946.) Italy, with neorealism (or, as he calls it, "the Italian school of the Liberation"), was building a new cinema out of the ashes of Fascism and war. What might this all mean for film culture in France?

One of the many merits of Timothy Barnard's new edition is that it puts Bazin back into history. The translation restores some of the urgency of the writing, while the copious footnotes supply much-needed context. Two of Barnard's footnotes are of particular interest. One, rather speculative, posits a possible indirect Brechtian influence on Bazin's ideas about the intrinsic differences between theater and cinema. And the other, which is trenchant and factual and speculative only on the margins, concerns the meaning of the French word *découpage*, often translated into English as "editing" or "cutting." *Découpage* in French means many things, from carving a fowl or joint to the shooting script for a film. What it does *not* mean is film editing (which is always *montage*). English translators, not just of Bazin, almost invariably get this wrong (Jonathan Rosenbaum and Tom Milne stand out as exceptions). What *découpage* really means is the way a film *in potentia*, as idea or as notated in a script, segments itself into scenes, sequences, shots, etc. The way Bazin uses it, the term *découpage* also embraces elements of mise-en-scène—at least to the extent that the visual content of a shot is already present in the filmmaker's mind, along with the inevitable need for shot transitions, prior to actual shooting. Failure to grasp this, Barnard argues, has led to serious misunderstanding of Bazin in the English-speaking world—as serious, I would add, as the mechanical assumption that there is something intrinsically "Bazinian" about the use of the long take (Warhol? Jancsó?). To understand quite how important this is, read Bazin's essay "William Wyler, or the Jansenist of Mise en Scène."

Barnard's selection of texts overlaps substantially with the first of the existing two volumes issued under the same title, *What Is Cinema?*, by University of California Press in 1967 and 1971, translated by Hugh Gray. It adds the Wyler essay and also contains Bazin's synoptic essay on neorealism, "Cinematic realism and the Italian School of the Liberation." It is far more scholarly than the existing edition, both in its annotations and in the quality of the translation, which is both elegant and accurate. (The publisher's website, www.caboosebooks.net, has testimonials to the qualities of the new edition from many leading scholars but to know just how error-strewn the original translation was, and has long been known to be, readers should go back to Richard Roud's excoriating review in *Sight and Sound*, spring 1968.)

For copyright reasons the new edition is only being offered for sale in Canada and a few other countries which did not sign up to the recent extension of copyright to seventy years from an author's death. Bazin died in 1958, so in theory U.S., British, and Australian readers might have to wait until 2028 before finding it in a bookstore. This would be a pity and I hope that librarians will seek it out and thereby make it available to the students and scholars who rightly still read Bazin's seminal texts. © 2011 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH is the author of *Making Waves: New Cinemas of the 1960s* (Continuum, 2008).

BOOK DATA André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Timothy Barnard. Montreal: Caboose, 2009. $CAN 50.00 cloth. 354 pages.

ANDREW UTTERSON

Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds by Timothy Murray

The newness of "new media"—a term popularized in the 1990s and 2000s by texts such as Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* (MIT Press, 2001)—has always been a bone of contention, suggesting as it does a definitive break with the past, with existing media, such as cinema, cast as "old" (with all the pejorative connotations associated with this word), out of kilter with the zeal and rhetoric of "digital revolution." Much of the writing on cinema and "new media" has grappled with the historical status of a category that bears the modern—the "new"—in its very name. Like Manovich, D. N. Rodowick in *The Virtual Life of Film* (Harvard University Press, 2007) explicitly historicizes "new media," emphasizing continuity as much as change. Yet, if these and other books have offered revealing historical perspectives, and correctives to the discourse of revolution, Timothy Murray's *Digital Baroque* must take the prize for the most surprising fusion of old and new, given its combination of the baroque expressions and ideas drawn from "the rich fabric of early modern thought" (50), on the one hand, and the (post-?) cinematic forms of contemporary digital media, on the other. With a purview that spans half a millennium, Murray makes a case for the relevance of the philosophical paradigms of early modern thinkers—Leibniz, Descartes, and others—as a lens through which to make sense of contemporary cinema and related arts.

In doing so, the author redefines traditional conceptions of the baroque, adopting instead ideas elaborated by Gilles Deleuze, particularly in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988; University of Minnesota Press, 1993). For most read-

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ers, this long-established art-historical term denotes ornate detail, dynamic flourishes, and artistic excess; for Murray —via Deleuze—it also suggests a more complex territory of "analogical disjunction, temporal shifts, spatial simultaneities, and conceptual incompossibilities [*sic*]" (xi). Such notions are used to make sense of the transformations of cinema as analog and digital meld and mutate, with Murray dwelling mainly on a grouping of philosophically literate filmmakers whose work addresses the implications of technological change. The installations of Nam June Paik, Bill Viola, and Mona Hatoum, for example, are read as "baroque constructions of space, light, passion, memory, and utopia" (40), works that constitute, in their use of digital technology, "a paradoxical return to primitivism, mysticism, and spiritualism" (38). Jean-Luc Godard's reworking of Shakespeare in *King Lear* (1987) is framed in terms of the director's "baroque legacy" (85) and his reflection on the crisis—or "death," as is suggested in his *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–98)—of cinema. Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991), another Shakespeare adaptation, is discussed in terms of its idealization of knowledge, libraries, and the written word, part of "a cinematic cornucopia of digitally animated books, ideas, and European fantasies" (112). Chris Marker's *Level Five* (1997) and CD-ROM *Immemory* (1998)—described as a "digitized imaginary museum" (228)—are conceptualized in terms of "memory and memorialization" (138) as the history of cinema, and its potential demise, are archived, layered, and folded into broader discourses of mnemonics, trauma, and loss (indeed memory forms a conceptual thread throughout Murray's book).

As Murray notes when he acknowledges his "titular paradox" (10), "digital" and "baroque" are unlikely bedfellows, and at times Murray's invocation of the baroque appears itself like unnecessary adornment to provocative, insightful, and illuminating analyses. At others, however, the author's conceptual dexterity (and his development of Deleuze, in particular) is persuasive, providing new perspectives and interpretative angles. It should be noted that Murray's language is often needlessly difficult. Describing "the baffled resonance of a loud fart" (97) and its "haptic affect" (98), for instance—no mean feat in itself!—Murray refers to said sonic rupture, from a scene in Godard's *King Lear*, as nothing less than a "bilabial fricative" (97), leaving this particular reader scrabbling for his dictionary. Yet, this does not greatly detract from Murray's encyclopedic knowledge of digital art and his ability to forge connections with the realm of cinema. In further discussing *King Lear*, for example, Murray quotes from the Woody Allen character (Mr. Alien, a Godardian pun), who sits at an editing table, celluloid in his grasp, and speaks of "handling in both hands the present, the future, and the past" (97). With *Digital Baroque*, Murray performs an equivalent conceptual folding, with "new media" established —across three hundred-plus pages and several centuries—as offering a revealing glimpse of cinema's simultaneous passing and rebirth. © 2011 Andrew Utterson

ANDREW UTTERSON is Senior Lecturer in Film and Digital Media at Canterbury Christ Church University, U.K., and author of *From IBM to MGM: Cinema at the Dawn of the Digital Age* (BFI Publishing, 2011).

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REBECCA PRIME

Caught in the Crossfire: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Americanism in 1940s Hollywood by Jennifer E. Langdon

With a few exceptions—David O. Selznick, Irving Thalberg, and Darryl Zanuck come to mind—Hollywood's producers are an understudied group, languishing in the shadows of auteur theory. Jennifer E. Langdon's study of the blacklisted writer and producer Adrian Scott presents a fascinating counter-example of a producer who succeeded in making personal films within the studio system. Through detailed histories of three of Scott's productions—*Murder, My Sweet* (1944), *Cornered* (1945), and *Crossfire* (1947)—Langdon documents his creative vision, which she credits with spearheading the postwar trend for political films noir. Given Scott's Communist Party membership, these production histories also revisit the debates surrounding the House Committee on Un-American Activities' charges of Communist influence in Hollywood and, in doing so, elucidate the role of the producer in the studio system.

For a brief period in the mid-1940s, Scott was hailed as Hollywood's "new boy wonder" (88). Put under contract by RKO as a screenwriter in 1942, he was soon promoted to producer, a position he saw as key to creative control. Working closely with the screenwriter John Paxton and the director Edward Dmytryk, Scott quickly established his reputation as a producer of low-budget, commercially successful thrillers. Buoyed by the success of *Murder, My Sweet*, his second producing credit and an influential early noir, Scott turned his attention toward the fight against fascism in his next two films, *Cornered* and *Crossfire*. As for many

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Hollywood progressives of his generation, Scott's antifascism was central to his vision of both himself and his country. His decision to make *Crossfire*, an indictment of American anti-Semitism, stemmed not only from his concern with the rise of native fascism, but from a desire to confirm his "sense of himself as both a political radical and a cutting-edge, even controversial, filmmaker" (144). Scott's opportunity to take pleasure in *Crossfire*'s unexpected success, however, was abruptly curtailed when, in September 1947, he was subpoenaed by HUAC.

Langdon cites new evidence from Scott and Dmytryk's FBI files that suggests an intimate connection between these two events. In May 1947, the FBI provided HUAC with a list of the eleven Hollywood subversives who most concerned them. In Langdon's estimation, "it cannot be a coincidence that the only two [non-Jewish] Americans on this list were the producer and director of *Crossfire* . . . Scott and Dmytryk appear to have been specifically targeted by HUAC not because they were Communists . . . but because of their work on *Crossfire*, a very dangerous film in the eyes of HUAC" (309).

As Langdon demonstrates in the four chapters she devotes to her analysis of the film's production and reception, in presenting the possibility of an incipient American fascism, *Crossfire* was seen as a challenge to the spirit of consensus that was rapidly replacing the progressive, New Deal culture of prewar Hollywood (and America).

Although Langdon's discussion of *Crossfire*'s reception, particularly the mixed reaction it provoked from the Jewish community, is revealing, she overstates the film's import. Her claim that it asks the "defining questions of Cold War America" (163)—questions that "resonated as powerfully for *Crossfire*'s audiences as they did for its producers"—is not supported by the (delightfully articulate and insightful) audience preview cards she quotes. Likewise, her assertion that *Crossfire* "suggests that noir was . . . an ideal vehicle for dramatizing antifascism" (174) is not backed up by extensive stylistic analysis; her discussion of Scott's casting choices and the performance of race and masculinity in the film demonstrates Scott's antifascist vision but not an organic link with the noir aesthetics employed in its expression.

Langdon's exemplary archival methodology is more effective at illuminating the challenges faced by radical filmmakers in postwar Hollywood, caught between the demands of the studios and those of their Communist Party colleagues. In documenting Scott's struggles to bring his politics to the screen, Langdon makes clear that while the studios held the power to frustrate such ambition, much depended on the individuals involved. *Cornered*, intended by Scott as a hard-hitting antifascist drama, was brought down several notches by executive interference (John Wexley's script was shorn of much of its political content in John Paxton's rewrite), whereas *Crossfire* retained more of Scott's vision due to the crucial support of RKO's new production chief, Dore Schary.

While Scott's story is ultimately a tragic one of unfulfilled potential, *Caught in the Crossfire*, which exists in an online version in addition to a hard copy, indicates the possibilities of e-publishing for film history. Like DVD "critical editions," the online version features a multitude of "extras" such as a high-quality and highly usable digital archive that contains copies of many of the key documents cited by Langdon. Both versions would benefit from the addition of a filmography and an index (the e-version offers a functional search engine) and the hard copy includes numerous typographical and formatting errors.

Caught in the Crossfire differs from other recent blacklist publications, such as Larry Ceplair's biography of the screenwriter Paul Jarrico, *The Marxist and the Movies* (University of Kentucky Press, 2007), and Gerald Horne's comprehensive study of John Howard Lawson, *The Final Victim of the Blacklist* (University of California Press, 2006), in the specificity of its periodization. In positioning Scott at the fulcrum of the intense cultural debates concerning the meaning of "Americanism" in the postwar years, *Caught in the Crossfire* suggests that HUAC's real interests lay less in purging Hollywood of Communism than of the liberal, New Deal values Scott so well embodied. © 2011 Rebecca Prime

REBECCA PRIME is the Libman Professor of the Humanities at Hood College.

BOOK DATA Jennifer E. Langdon, *Caught in the Crossfire: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Americanism in 1940s Hollywood.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. $60.00 cloth. 444 pages. E-book: www.gutenberg-e.org/langdon/.

DAN STREIBLE

Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories
ed. Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann

Which of the following is an accurate characterization? Home movies are: documents of the everyday; not documents of the everyday; counter-documents; films without an interest in profit; colonized by Hollywood; lost histories of a frequently invisible working class; feminine, as opposed to masculine professional films; a stimulant for nostalgia; a medium of joy; boring for those outside the family; the greatest record of much of our culture; deceptive documentaries; hidden histories of the world; a festival of Oedipal relations.

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Langdon's exemplary archival methodology is more effective at illuminating the challenges faced by radical filmmakers in postwar Hollywood, caught between the demands of the studios and those of their Communist Party colleagues. In documenting Scott's struggles to bring his politics to the screen, Langdon makes clear that while the studios held the power to frustrate such ambition, much depended on the individuals involved. *Cornered*, intended by Scott as a hard-hitting antifascist drama, was brought down several notches by executive interference (John Wexley's script was shorn of much of its political content in John Paxton's rewrite), whereas *Crossfire* retained more of Scott's vision due to the crucial support of RKO's new production chief, Dore Schary.

While Scott's story is ultimately a tragic one of unfulfilled potential, *Caught in the Crossfire*, which exists in an online version in addition to a hard copy, indicates the possibilities of e-publishing for film history. Like DVD "critical editions," the online version features a multitude of "extras" such as a high-quality and highly usable digital archive that contains copies of many of the key documents cited by Langdon. Both versions would benefit from the addition of a filmography and an index (the e-version offers a functional search engine) and the hard copy includes numerous typographical and formatting errors.

Caught in the Crossfire differs from other recent blacklist publications, such as Larry Ceplair's biography of the screenwriter Paul Jarrico, *The Marxist and the Movies* (University of Kentucky Press, 2007), and Gerald Horne's comprehensive study of John Howard Lawson, *The Final Victim of the Blacklist* (University of California Press, 2006), in the specificity of its periodization. In positioning Scott at the fulcrum of the intense cultural debates concerning the meaning of "Americanism" in the postwar years, *Caught in the Crossfire* suggests that HUAC's real interests lay less in purging Hollywood of Communism than of the liberal, New Deal values Scott so well embodied. © 2011 Rebecca Prime

REBECCA PRIME is the Libman Professor of the Humanities at Hood College.

BOOK DATA Jennifer E. Langdon, *Caught in the Crossfire: Adrian Scott and the Politics of Americanism in 1940s Hollywood.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. $60.00 cloth. 444 pages. E-book: www.gutenberg-e.org/langdon/.

DAN STREIBLE

Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories
ed. Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann

Which of the following is an accurate characterization? Home movies are: documents of the everyday; not documents of the everyday; counter-documents; films without an interest in profit; colonized by Hollywood; lost histories of a frequently invisible working class; feminine, as opposed to masculine professional films; a stimulant for nostalgia; a medium of joy; boring for those outside the family; the greatest record of much of our culture; deceptive documentaries; hidden histories of the world; a festival of Oedipal relations.

Each characterization is suggested by one of the twenty-seven contributors to the anthology *Mining the Home Movie*, a timely compendium that reflects the fact that the scholarly analysis of home movies has established a foothold in media studies (though not yet in cinema textbooks).

Writing about home movies is not entirely new. Scholars have sporadically published essays over the past couple decades, although no sustained wave of publication immediately followed the English-language breakthrough work on the subject, Patricia R. Zimmermann's often-cited *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (1995). In 2000 collector Alan Kattelle self-published his authoritative tome, *Home Movies: A History of the American Industry, 1897–1979*, which became an essential reference source. In the ensuing decade, curators and archivists began to pay more attention to these small-gauge films, making them more accessible to researchers. The coalescence of archival, academic, and artistic interests is manifest in the roster of contributors to *Mining the Home Movie*. Most, like co-editor Karen L. Ishizuka, have hybrid identities—archivist–scholar, filmmaker–historian, curator–researcher. But if we go by the chief occupation of each one, the fifteen archivists outnumber the seven academics and five media artists. This archival bent reflects how the study of home movies has recently unfolded. Small-gauge and amateur film enthusiasts are a strong constituency among moving-image archivists. They have shared their interest with evangelical zeal, with worldwide Home Movie Day in 2003 screenings being their most notable achievement (see www.homemovieday.com).

Half of the essays profile archives at which their respective authors work. For readers not familiar with the archival world, these deliver a valuable, succinct introduction. Alongside the major established film archives (the Library of Congress, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, UCLA, Netherlands Filmmuseum) are important regional institutions such as Northeast Historic Film (U.S.) and North West Film Archive (U.K.), which have established collecting, access, and outreach policies for amateur films that generate scholarship of a quality and magnitude disproportionate to their resources. Karan Sheldon and Dwight Swanson write in detail about Northeast Historic Film's rediscovery of a series of 16mm shorts, each entitled *The Movie Queen*, made by itinerant filmmaker Margaret Cram in the 1930s. Each reenacts the same script in a different small town in the northeast, with casts of local amateurs. An essay by the late Maryann Gomes analyzes images of working-class people found at North West Film Archive (where amateur films outnumber professionals two to one). Nearly all of the home movies were made by middle-class families, so she gives special notice to the only two working-class cineastes represented in the archive (one of whom made ninety-three films) for their recordings of daily life in 1950s Britain.

The book grants material from the Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles) more attention than any other set of films. As the editors explain in their introduction, the depth of interest in the home movies of Dave Tatsuno has been exceptional. Most were shot clandestinely between 1942–45, while he and his California family were interned at the Topaz "relocation" camp in Utah. Four essays analyze the significance of this silent 8mm color footage. Ishizuka and Robert Nakamura detail their use of the Topaz films in their documentary, *Something Strong Within* (1994). Robert Rosen then discusses "memory workers" who transform these events and recordings into historical memory: documentarians, home-moviemakers, spectators. After a profile of the museum, Ishizuka and Zimmermann argue that the addition of Tatsuno's work to the National Film Registry in 1996 helped validate the larger enterprise of studying home movies. While Tatsuno's rare and atypical films receive disproportionate coverage, the essays make a convincing case for their importance and canonization.

Mining the Home Movie is wide-ranging rather than definitive. It does not propose, for example, any fixed distinction between the terms "home movie" and "amateur film" (a broader category). However, as the contributors make clear, home movies are strikingly diverse in both form and content, and it is therefore understandable that some essays digress to explore films which are not strictly home movies (itinerant productions, local newsreels, documentary outtakes). Other welcome features of *Mining the Home Movie* include a translation of French film theorist Roger Odin's provocative work on "family films," which reminds us that an "amateur film movement" has been apparent in European scholarship since the 1980s and remains strong. Liz Czach's select filmography and bibliography will prove valuable to readers interested in teaching or writing about this subject. Her annotated list of seventy-two films that make significant use of home movies—and which are actually in distribution—is well selected and her bibliography smartly supplemented with relevant works of critical theory and historiography. © 2011 Dan Streible

DAN STREIBLE teaches cinema studies and moving image archiving and preservation at New York University. He organizes the biennial Orphan Film Symposium.

BOOK DATA Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann (eds), *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 360 pages

GARY GIDDINS, CINEPHILE

Have you ever found yourself wondering, as Gary Giddins did, about the provenance, the etymology, of the term "film noir"?—in other words, where the term comes from, who coined it, for what reasons, and with what effects? The term was first used well after the event—a point to which I shall advert in short order—in order to denote the perceived "similarities between Hollywood's 1940s wave of brutal crime films and the pulp fiction that had appeared in France under the rubric *Série noire*" at much the same time (*Warning Shadows*, 329). What remains interesting about film noir as a genre, and what distinguishes it from other genres in the history of film, is noir's distinctively and overwhelmingly retroactive character. It was not available *as* a genre, that is to say, when the major films making it up were themselves being made. People making Westerns, by contrast, knew full well that Westerns, or examples of a genre called "the Western," were what they were putting together; but no one ever set out, or could have set out, to make an instance of the film noir in the same, forthright sense. Those who shot what later critics were to term film noir set out, rather, to make crime films and to do so by using certain conventions that only later were to be thought of as characterizing film noir as a determinate genre. In Giddins's words, unlike "Westerns, musicals, science fiction, and every other kind of genre, film noir didn't exist as a banner in the years it peaked as a style" (328).

More is involved here than an interesting, head-scratching little paradox, as Giddins, once again, is well aware: "many elements that have come to characterize film noir—high-contrast chiaroscuro lighting, expressionistic staging, hard-boiled stories set deep in the underworld, location shooting, themes of sexual betrayal and innocence undone—evolved in a more competitive than formulaic environment as filmmakers outdid each other in the relatively unmonitored world of low-budget second features." It was not until the 1970s that critics and filmmakers began "to fetishize the style" of film noir, "which at its best produced imaginative, fast-moving, disturbing films, fraught with incidents and ideas that slyly undermined the Production Code" (329). While just how noir films eroded the Code from within is a story that has yet to be written, Giddins (who knows his noir as he knows a lot of other genres, that is to say inside out and backwards) provides many valuable pointers. Noir, he continues, "proved to be a testing ground or preferred idiom for film-makers who later emerged as A-picture directors or cult figures, among them John Huston, Fred Zinnemann, Billy Wilder, Anthony Mann, Robert Wise, André De Toth, Jules Dassin, Sam Fuller, Richard Fleischer, Otto Preminger, Joseph Lewis and Nicholas Ray." All in all, quite an inventory of Hollywood talent: "Most classic noir films of the 1940s and 1950s, whatever their literary origins, were filmed by craftsmen who polished the material to a glossy sheen" (104). "These filmmakers, working in a then-déclassé genre with diminutive budgets and short shooting schedules, were goaded by ambition and fevered inventiveness. They wanted to prove themselves worthy of climbing the ladder to A pictures, with all their attendant glamour. Some succeeded, making better pictures in better circumstances, while making trade-offs in the process" (333).

Noirs, that is to say, "were made on the dark sides of the studios, bound by Production Code rules but permitted faux-documentary peeks into the nation's grubbiest corners" (334). "Despite impressive location exteriors . . . . realism is not really the point. Nor is the plot, although the twists and turns keep us guessing. Most of the stories are no better than magazine hack work. The art is in the style, the gloss, the way directors, editors, and actors use composition, lighting, cutting, and improvisation to make sequences a little different than usual—though occasional process shots remind us how conventional the conventions were. Cinematic panache"—here as elsewhere—"imparts its own substance" (324). But since "the art" in the above quotation would by no means be stretched out of shape if it were held to characterize not just noir in particular, but also film in general, Giddins's almost unrivaled knowledge of what became the genre of noir can serve to remind us of how *cinematic* noir was all along.

Giddins is at his most useful, when—as a film critic standing in between David Thomson and Dave Kehr—he turns to what has become a rather bewildering array of gangster and noir DVD boxed sets, not to mention the boxed sets from other genres like the Western. Giddins will steer you round the Anthony Mann reissues, the boxed sets of John Ford movies issued by Warner Bros., then Fox—not to mention other sets; and he will do so with pleasure, the pleasure of the authentic cinephile. His reviews are useful, not to say indispensable, but the delights of *Natural Selection* and *Warning Shadows* go beyond their sheer utility. I have long

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admired Giddins's writings on jazz, stretching as these do from his "Weather Bird" column in the *Village Voice* (which must have run for three decades) right up through his magnificent biography, *Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams*, which first appeared in 2001. I have also long been aware that Giddins also wrote about film, and wrote about it (just as we might expect) very well, since the occasional piece would surface in the *New York Times Book Review* or *Film Comment*, if not as liner notes to some or another DVD boxed set. What I had not realized is what Giddins himself recalls—that as a journeyman critic who was, on his own admission, up for grabs for a while, and who was busily "collecting enough rejections from newspapers and magazines to insulate a Quonset hut" (*Natural Selection*, xi), he got his first movie column (in the *Hollywood Reporter*) on the recommendation of someone he'd interviewed for the jazz journal *Down Beat* about the bass player Charles Mingus. Giddins decided to be primarily a jazz critic and secondarily a film critic only in 1972 partly because, in writing for a trade paper like the *Hollywood Reporter*, "you have to review everything" (xiii), including films fated never to find a distributor. Nor had I realized, perched as I am on the Pacific Rim, where the *New York Sun* failed to shine during its brief life (2002–08), how extensive Giddins's film criticism was to remain, how prolific a writer about film (as well as jazz) he was and still is. Most potential readers of the two books under review will likely have lived in similar ignorance of the late *New York Sun* (home to Giddins's once-weekly DVD column), and this serves to make these two books, which are made up largely of his columns, all the more welcome.

Natural Selection was first published by Oxford University Press in 2006, *Warning Shadows* by Norton in 2010. The dates are interesting: this is to speculate, but it is as though some enterprising editor at Norton read *Natural Selection* and recognized that in it only 160 of 410 pages seem to be devoted to film exclusively (though this is to underestimate somewhat, since much of the earlier section on comedy is devoted to film comedy). This is not to say that *Natural Selection* is *lacking* in breadth. To the contrary, its comedy section covers Chaplin, Keaton, Harold Lloyd, the Marx Brothers, even unto Bob Hope and—yes—Jerry Lewis (though not, sad to say, Harry Langdon); its cinema section proceeds to add Edison, Lon Chaney, Lang, *Children of Paradise*, noir, Wyler, Dassin, Becker, Garbo, Crosby (as an actor), Doris Day, Ray Harryhausen, Renoir, Cassavetes' *Shadows*, Bresson, Alain Delon, and others. An impressive spread in its own right that is nevertheless open to the augmentation *Warning Shadows* duly supplies. Indeed, *Warning Shadows* adds to *Natural Selection*'s inventory not only an alarming title ("home alone" among "warning shadows" manages to suggest that there is a stalker in the neighborhood, and this is not necessarily the case). *Warning Shadows* also adds an almost alarming array of additions to *Natural Selection*'s inventory: Lubitsch, Ford, Hawks, Capra, Hitchcock, Wellman, Welles, Curtiz, Mann, Fuller, Lumet, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Edward G. Robinson ("the only Jew De Mille cast in a leading role" [166]), Bogart, Sinatra (as an actor), James Stewart, Boris Karloff. (As an aside, if there's one weakness film buffs and jazz fans—Giddins and I are both—have in common, it is that of making lists. *Mea maxima culpa*.) The remarkable thing is not just that Giddins has pointed and original observations to make about each and every constituent of this long list, but also that throughout his successive treatments breadth is never stressed at the expense of depth. This in spite of the (rarely apparent) fact that these essays were, for the most part, written weekly or biweekly under a deadline.

Giddins's *aperçus* are biting without ever being cruel: "Welles, like Jelly Roll Morton, was an inveterate liar whose most outrageous claims often turned out to be true" (*Warning Shadows*, 76); Bergman's films "are not beyond criticism, just impervious to it" (114); Sam Wood's "oeuvre has long been ignored because of his politics and his humorlessness in dealing with the Marx Brothers. This is unfair: his pictures merit derision in their own right" (177); in Kazan's *Baby Doll*, Karl Malden "moves like an addled rooster," while Eli Wallach "oozes revenge. . . . a twinkling light in each of his otherwise obsidian eyes" (255); *The Sound of Music* is "the happiest of all musicals involving Nazis except for *The Producers*" (285); Lady in Disney's *Lady and the Tramp* is "a cocker spaniel who looks at times like . . . Alistair Sim" (309).

In general, the wide range involved in the above lists should serve to remind us not just of Giddins's generosity as a film critic but also of his latitude. In one particularly interesting *Natural Selection* review of a boxed set of Renoirs, Giddins finds and advances what are genuinely interesting points about Renoir's (arguably) least defensible and (indisputably) least defended films, *Elena and the Men* (1956), his vehicle for Ingrid Bergman, and *The Golden Coach*, his 1953 vehicle (in more senses than one) for Anna Magnani. *Warning Shadows* is Giddins's "first book exclusively devoted to movies" (14). Let's be selfish and hope it is the first of many more.

PAUL THOMAS teaches politics at the University of California, Berkeley.

BOOK DATA Gary Giddins, *Natural Selection: Gary Giddins on Comedy, Film, Music, and Books*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 432 pages. $19.95 paper.

Gary Giddins, *Warning Shadows: Home Alone with Classic Cinema*. New York: Norton, 2010. 416 pages. $18.95 paper.

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

HISTORY *Film Quarterly* was founded in 1958 by the University of California Press and can thus claim to be the longest-running critical film magazine in the United States. The first issue was volume 12, number 1 because the new publication reincarnated two previous periodicals: *Hollywood Quarterly* (1945–51) and its follow-up, the *Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* (1951–57). The founding editor was Ernest Callenbach, who remained at the helm for thirty-three years. Ann Martin suceeded him in 1991 and steered *Film Quarterly* until 2005.

Film Quarterly is best described as a scholarly magazine, blending research and intelligent journalism, aimed at both specialist and general readers. *Film Quarterly* maintains strong ties with academic Film Studies nationwide (and internationally), as well as with other disciplines where film study thrives, but its intellectual agenda is independent.

Those interested in learning more about the evolution of the journal's editorial character can consult the archive of back issues on JSTOR (www.jstor.org). Two historical overviews are also recommended: the introduction by Brian Henderson to *Film Quarterly: Forty Years—An Introduction* (University of California Press, 1999), edited by Henderson and Ann Martin, and "Da Capo" by Ernest Callenbach, an essay published in the fiftieth anniversary issue (fall 2008). "Da Capo" is available online, together with several pieces from every recent issue as well as web exclusives, at www.filmquarterly.org.

In 2007, the layout of *Film Quarterly* was redesigned in order to accommodate shorter forms of writing (alongside reviews and features), notably columns and reports on festivals or urban film scenes. The rationale was summarized in the fall 2007 editorial: "The new formats . . . are meant to enhance *Film Quarterly*'s appeal to people who think seriously about movies, whether they do so inside or outside the academy. The crucial premise is that readability can be increased without compromising intellectual rigor—for surely compact lucidity, and indeed eloquence, are intellectual virtues."

The current, London-based editor works closely with the book review editor, who commissions dozens of reviews each year, and with members of the editorial board—distinguished scholars from several disciplines who help shape the journal's policies and also provide reader reports.

SUBMISSIONS *Film Quarterly* has a core group of contributors—writers-at-large, the chief book critic, columnists, members of the editorial board—and also welcomes submissions from writers, whether newcomers or veteran critics, striving to address a wide audience. Writing skill (or promise) and suitability are what matter, not institutional status or formal qualification.

Submissions are invited in the following categories: career overviews (4000–6000 words); round-up articles encompassing several films or filmmakers—especially articles which cover documentary or digital technology (4000–6000); interviews with filmmakers (2000–5000); reviews of newly released films or DVDs (2500–3500); opinion pieces, especially arguments about the state of film criticism or polemical responses to new films (1500–2500); festival or city reports (2000); book reviews (900). Please consult recent issues for examples of each format.

Inquiries about, and submissions of, book reviews should be addressed directly to Matthew H. Bernstein (mbernst@emory.edu—review copies should be mailed by publishers to: Matthew H. Bernstein, Emory University, Film Studies Department, 109 Rich Building, 1602 Fishburne Drive, Atlanta GA 30322).

All other submissions, pitches, and inquiries should be sent electronically to the editor (fq.submissions@gmail.com). The submitted piece or proposal must not be under consideration by another publication or submitted elsewhere until (in the event that the editor does not take the proposal forward) thirty days after submission to *Film Quarterly*. If the submission is part of a larger project, such as a forthcoming book, this should be stated in the covering remarks.

Film Quarterly has a policy on conflict of interests. When making a submission, prospective authors should mention if any person under discussion is an acquaintance of the author or if any other interest exists.

If accepted by the editor, articles and book reviews are read by two peer reviewers; film reviews and some reports and interviews are also sent out to at least one reader. The identity and institutional affiliation of authors are not disclosed to readers in order to ensure impartiality; reader comments relayed to authors are also anonymous. Once begun, the review process takes no longer than six weeks and is often completed more quickly. If an offer of publication is made, authors can expect further feedback from the editor, who has a hands-on approach.

Rob White (editor)